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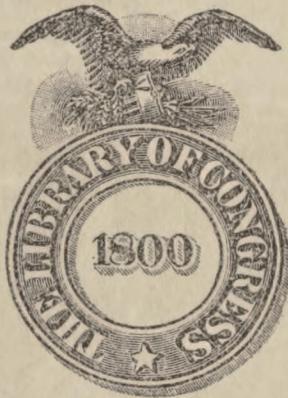
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HELPS
FOR STUDENT-WRITERS

Willard E. Hawkins

FIRST SERIES

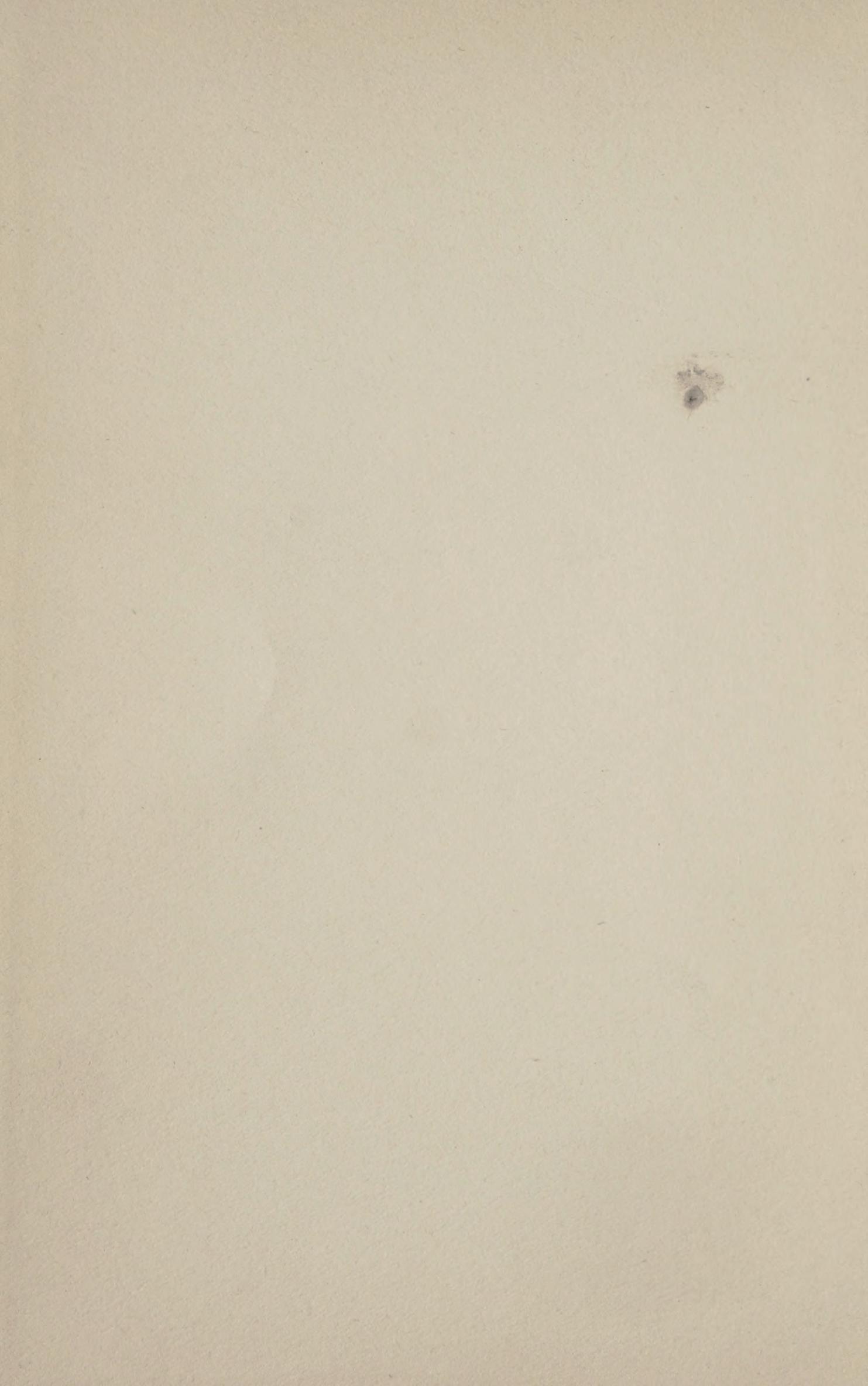


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BY

WILLARD E. HAWKINS

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No. 2.

FOREWORD

TO PUT in concrete form suggestions that may help those who are struggling along the path of authorship is the central purpose of this volume. With this purpose is allied that of avoiding familiar text-book platitudes. Whatever may be said of the individual papers, they are at least products of original thinking—not compilations of what various authorities have said. In each, the aim has been to present an answer to some fundamental problem that confronts the literary worker. These problems are of two kinds—technical and temperamental. The aid I have attempted to offer has not been confined exclusively to either. When published in magazine form through *The Student-Writer*, the articles brought sufficient response to indicate that they met the requirements of many to whom they were addressed.

Abstract discussions have been avoided. Artistic standards, it is hoped, have not been ignored; but the particular audience to which the suggestions are addressed is composed of those who are trying to write for publication—beginners as well as professionals. Hence the many concrete illustrations and the practical note that runs through all the papers.

Those who do not in all cases agree with my conclusions should remember that the methods advised and illus-

trated are not held to be the only methods of writing craftsmanship. They are, however, methods that have been found dependable in practice. Some students have argued that I place too much dependence upon rules. On the contrary, I place so little dependence on any rule that I insist upon knowing the principle back of it before I consider it worth employing even as an occasional guide. Others have felt that undue emphasis has been laid upon plot. With those who insist that the best short-story has no plot such as is usually defined I am inclined to agree. But this type of tale is rarely acceptable to publishers of today. Even while lamenting the demand that seems to exist for plots rather than for stories, I am constrained to advise writers who are looking toward publication that plot is the most essential thing in salable fiction. The genius who can discard this advice needs no urging of mine to do so. Rules never hampered a writer strong enough to rise without them.

Finally, I shall be satisfied if assured that the little book, though it cannot teach students all that they need to know about writing, has at least proved helpful to them in their work.

Grateful acknowledgement must be made to the many who have urged the publication of this material in book form, and particularly to Mr. John H. Clifford, whose scholarship and long experience in the revision of standard book editions have been invaluable to me in insuring the correct typography of the book, in preparing these articles for magazine publication, and again in revising them for this final edition.

W. E. H.

CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Foreword | 7 |
| Plot and Climax Essentials | 13 |
| Can We Afford to be Original? | 21 |
| The Attitude of Mind | 25 |
| Have a Standard of Style | 29 |
| An Aid to Standardization | 30 |
| “Snowballing” a Plot | 33 |
| The Stone Wall of Talent | 43 |
| Why Strive for Unity | 51 |
| The Precipice of Suspense | 57 |
| Fixing the Viewpoint | 61 |
| Word Lenses | 69 |
| The Place of Technique | 75 |
| Creative Characterization | 77 |
| The Law of Rhythmic Development | 87 |
| Photoplays or Fiction? | 93 |
| Naming the Characters | 95 |
| Hackneyed Plots | 97 |
| “He Said” and “She Said” | 101 |
| The Boiler and the Whistle | 105 |
| The Purpose of Fiction | 111 |

PLOT AND CLIMAX ESSENTIALS

IN A PLOT SENSE, it may be said that the whole of a short-story is the climax. The most concise and practical definition of plot that I have found is: A problem and its solution. If a tale can not be reduced to this formula, it is a simple narrative, rather than a short-story. The phrase constitutes not only a definition, but a recipe for the planning of fiction. One writer puts the matter thus: "To write stories that sell isn't much of a trick. It appears to be a matter of stating a problem, then solving it in a way that is logical but not perfectly obvious."

From a purely mechanical viewpoint, this is indeed the whole of plot building. However, it is not altogether a simple matter to make the solution logical without making it too obvious. Problems are easy to devise—they confront us at every turn—but it is not so easy to solve them effectively.

Suppose, for instance, that you allow your boy hero to have his foot captured in a rock crevice which holds him prisoner inside a cave, while the tide slowly rises over his head. There you have a problem: How is the boy's life to be saved? But the answer presents a good many difficulties. You might allow him to work his foot loose—but that would be obvious. You might let the tide fail to reach its usual height—but that would not be logical. A writer for *The American Boy* solved this problem by causing the hero to put the bulb of his camera in his mouth, while he held the open end of the rubber tube above the surface of the water. By

means of this improvised diving apparatus, he was able to sustain life until rescue came. The result was a rattling good boy's story, because the solution of the problem was logical, yet not obvious. The average reader would not have anticipated it.

The relative importance of the two elements of plot would be better indicated if we phrased our definition: Plot is the solution of a problem. For the solution is the all-important thing. When an editor returns your story with the comment, "A well-written tale, but it lacks a novel twist," he means that you have solved the problem in a familiar way. The reader knows the answer before it is given. The best possible plot material is a new device for solving a problem. Have your climax—the solution—to start with, then devise a problem to fit it.

It is probable that in writing the story of the boy and the water trap the author followed the plan of working back from the climax. Perhaps he had noted the similarity between a camera tube and a diving apparatus. This would lead to the invention of an emergency in which the tube could be used for just such a purpose. The introductory part would be reached the last thing before actual development began—the boy's possession of the camera must be accounted for by giving him an interest in photography, and his pursuit of that art must bring him into the position of danger from which his presence of mind finally rescues him.

Yet, though the plot must have been worked out backward from solution to problem, it comes to the reader problem first. The result is a logically worked-out story, with an unexpected twist at the climax.

As a means of stimulating a writer's invention, the advice is sometimes given: "Let your characters fall into difficulties, then set your wits to extricate them." This method sometimes works very well; but more often the result is commonplace. Many somehow ineffective stories that have come to my desk were obviously developed by this method. The author has put the characters into a situation which at once captures the reader's interest; but the climax, or solution, is a bare working out of details which reveal

only moderate powers of invention. It is usually forced, obvious, and mediocre.

In testing a plot idea, consider chiefly the possibilities for a striking climax. Almost every germinal idea may be used either for the opening situation—the problem—or for the solution. By all means, however, let it serve as your climax. Let me illustrate:

Suppose we conceive the idea of a vengeful flock of hawks, which bring about the death of many aviators by attacking them in the air and causing them to lose control of their machines.

The idea contains possibilities either for a problem or for the solution of a problem. For convenience, suppose we lay the scene in the future, when a night patrol of the heavens has become a natural extension of police service. Let us consider first the plan of using the idea as the basis of our *problem*.

The birds are the recognized enemies of the sky-police. They make nightly attacks on the air-patrolmen, clawing and pecking at their eyes, and flapping their faces, until the aviators become frantic and fall to earth. Many fatalities result. The problem of ridding the air of this scourge is serious. It must be granted that this makes a situation that may be so developed as to grip the reader.

But, to my mind, when we reach the point of the climax no very effective solution of the problem presents itself. Various methods could be devised for exterminating the birds; but this is not at all a surprising development. A short-story so worked out will be almost certain to prove somewhat disappointing. We shall have wasted all our powder in the preliminary attack upon the reader's interest. There is nothing left that is quite effective enough, in comparison with the opening situation, to grip him. The statement of the problem contains our supreme effort of invention.

Now that we have tried this mode of construction and found it wanting, suppose we transpose the factors. Let the birds and their part in the affair remain out of sight until the climax. The problem will be to ascertain what it is that causes the seemingly inexplicable deaths of the sky-patrolmen.

I feel certain that this was the logical construction for "A Nemesis of the Air," because it enabled me to prepare the reader's mind carefully for the strongest revelation of my story—the nature of the mysterious cause which sent the aviators hurtling to their death. Incidentally, a magazine editor thought so too. The only solution that suggests itself in the early development is the supernatural one contained in the curse of an old inventor who was disappointed at not receiving the contract for municipal aeroplanes. The inventor had died, insisting that his vengeance would pursue the sky-police and bring them one by one to their deaths. The concluding revelation is that, on dying, he released a flock of hawks which had been trained to attack furiously any person wearing the uniform of the sky-police. Thus, the old man is responsible for the scourge, though not exactly in the supernatural way that his words would have indicated.

Another method possible in the development of this story would have been that of taking the old man's viewpoint, setting him the problem of "getting even" for his fancied wrongs, and solving this problem by the introduction of trained birds. This, however, would have made it difficult to secure surprise. The solution could not have been confined to the concluding paragraphs, where it would leave the strongest impression on the reader.

Similar inversion can be applied to almost any plot. The germ of the story is probably the feature which makes it worth the telling, and the question of where to concentrate its effectiveness is one of great importance. The germinal idea of the boy's story used for illustration was that of the improvised diving apparatus. Therefore it was best introduced at the climax.

Perhaps you have received a manuscript back with the editorial comment: "A good idea, but you have failed to make the most of it." Examine the story and see whether the criticism was not due to the fact that you employed your basic idea for the problem, rather than for the solution. Try an inversion of the plot elements to bring your strong point out at the conclusion. In a great many cases, this is just what is needed to make the most of the story's

possibilities. The "big idea," whatever it may be, is the feature that belongs in the solution of your problem. If you have devised a novel method of escape from a burglar-proof bank vault, by all means let that be the culmination of your action. If you have thought of a unique relation of characters toward each other, the chances are very much in favor of a story which makes this relation the climax, rather than the opening situation.

The student can not undertake a more efficient exercise for developing his plot sense than that of studying, from this viewpoint, published stories in all sorts of magazines. Dissect the narrative until you have the problem and the solution clearly in mind, then try to follow the train of reasoning which caused the writer to develop his story as he did, rather than otherwise. Note how, in most cases, the crux of the story is contained in the climax, and also how this climax idea might have been employed as the problem, rather than its solution, had not the author possessed the judgment to discern that, so employed, it would have failed to leave a strong final impression.

SURPRISE, we have seen, is one of the essential elements of plot effectiveness. It is more often than any other the factor that puts a story "across." A tale may contain what we have designated as most essential—a solution that is logical but not obvious—and still it may lack that sudden, irresistible culmination of events at the climax which makes for "punch."

Suppose, for instance, that the solution of your difficulty consists in causing the hero to take a course in college. It is possible to devise a situation of which this would be the natural and yet not altogether obvious solution. To originate a rough instance, he might find himself in love with a country girl whose dying father exacted from her a promise not to marry an uneducated man. This promise, we will say, was for the purpose of eliminating the hero from the race; but he overcomes his handicap by the solution mentioned.

Now such a climax, with its necessarily slow development,

would be obviously ineffective. By the time the reader has followed the boy through college, the effectiveness of the idea will have evaporated. The action is not sharp and quick as it should be for dramatic power, but leisurely and long drawn out.

Many themes are apparently unfitted for short-story development because of this drawback. The short-story culmination should be abrupt—sharply defined. A cloudburst is more dramatic than a drizzle. You experience a more definite shock from the sight of an aviator plunging to his death than from observing a victim of wasting illness, who is approaching death just as certainly, though more slowly. Suddenness, thus, is an important element of dramatic value. In many cases it may be said to give a story “punch.” To have your hero go through college will not, of itself, make a vivid climax, no matter how well it solves the problem involved; because the action lacks this necessary quality.

But it is sometimes possible to employ such a solution by devising other means for the surprise. Suppose we have the hero in the case under consideration come gradually to recognize that in solving his problem he has grown beyond the simple country girl he remembers, and no longer loves her. Thus another problem would be introduced in the solving of the first one. This second problem could be dramatically solved when they meet again and he discovers that the girl has more than kept pace with him.

Without an effective surprise of some kind, it may be said, few pieces of fiction find a market. The more striking the surprise, the more likely a sale—though, naturally, the quality of the market is dependent on literary value and other considerations. Sometimes, surprise may be given by letting the climax contain an unexpected revelation concerning the *motive* which caused the hero to solve the problem.

In a previous article, students were warned against too great a departure from the obvious. At first glance, the stress upon surprise may seem inconsistent with this. As a matter of fact, the two suggestions are entirely reconcilable. So far as possible, let the suddenness of your climax provide the surprise element. The

solution should come at the moment when the action seems farthest from a satisfactory outcome. When our college graduate comes home to break his engagement with the simple country girl is the time for him to make the discovery of her dazzling development during his absence.

Now, as to preparation for the climax. This is a delicate phase of story construction—or rather narration, since it is not until the story is being actually written that the difficulties become apparent. How often is the author in despair over a good idea that flattens because, in order to convey its meaning to the reader, the conclusion must be cumbered with explanations, description, and sidelights on character.

The less of these features, character drawing included, you have in your climax, the better rounded will it be. The place for your drawing of characters is in the preliminary narration. By the time you reach the climax we should know the story people so well that it is unnecessary to tell us *how* they did or said a thing. We should have such a clear picture of the scene, by this time, that no description is needed. We should have the key to all the action in advance, so that no explanations are necessary.

In the introduction, and in fact all through the narration preceding the climax, give us characterization and atmosphere in such doses as the action will permit. Remember that you are building for the climax. You impress upon us in the first part that the heroine has red-brown hair and speaks in a soft Southern drawl, in order that these details need not be mentioned at the last—thus, a simple statement of what she did will be sufficient to make us picture her as doing it. When you quote what she says at the conclusion, we naturally supply the tone in which the words were uttered.

From the foregoing discussion, a few simple rules for obtaining strength and balance in story structure may be deduced:

1. Plot consists of a problem and its solution.
2. The solution of the problem is the climax; and the climax, in a plot sense, is the story.
3. The three essentials of an effective climax are: It must be

logical; it must not be too obvious; it must have a sudden, surprising culmination, for the sake of dramatic effect.

4. The germinal idea of the story, usually, should form the basis of the solution, or climax, rather than the basis of the problem.

5. You are not ready for the climax until the characters have been brought to life in the reader's mind, so that bare, concise statements are all the reader needs in order to visualize the big scene.

CAN WE AFFORD TO BE ORIGINAL?

THE editorial cry for originality is unceasing. The student-writer, eager to please, does his best to satisfy the demand. His stories fairly bristle with novelty. But though he submits his offerings persistently, the long-anticipated acceptance, when it does come, is for what he deemed a hackneyed little tale, hardly worth the postage required to send it out.

He is naturally disconcerted by this but still retains his faith in the fetish of novelty. He explains the failure of his strikingly original stories and the acceptance of the simple little lack-novelty by the philosophic reflection that accidents will happen.

Further experience, however, convinces him that this was not an accident. The more novel his conceptions, the more likely they are to come back, while the occasional acceptances are for well-written old stories, containing perhaps a degree of novelty in the matter of setting, or a slightly new plot twist.

One of my correspondents whose work frequently appears in good magazines calls this the "dull-thud" type of story. In commenting on one of his own tales which appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, he observes that he has come to the conclusion that one of the strongest elements of salability—if not the strongest—is obviousness. "I believe it is true," he adds, "that editors want the reward-of-virtue stuff applied thickly and in words of one syllable. I find the same trouble with every story. If I twist the plot a little I can't sell it. If I retwist it to the obvious, it sells on the next trip."

If such conclusions were exceptional—but they are not. The same bewildered comment has come from dozens of writers who are beginning to break into print. The first impulse of the hopeful author on making this discovery is to assert that the editors either don't know what they want, or don't know originality when they see it.

This attitude is, of course, unjust to the editors. Their statements of what they want and the evidence of what they accept are more reconcilable than may appear on the surface. In fact, they are entirely reconcilable.

For one thing, the attempt to secure originality of plot generally results in excess of subtlety. Some of the most original writers I know succeed in marketing very little of their work. Much of it is exquisite artistically—but a subtle intellect is required to appreciate the theme and its development. Few magazines that are successful enough commercially to pay fair rates can afford to ignore entirely the everyday reader. General Reader is intelligent, but he cannot be said to revel in subtleties. What he likes is an interesting story, well told. If the writer has visualized his characters clearly and placed them in interesting situations, friend Reader does not care whether or not the basic plot is old. Neither does the editor. In fact, if the plot is of the familiar "reward-of-virtue" type, it may make a stronger impression than otherwise, because readers know that it is true—true to life and human nature. The story based on an entirely original theme may leave them doubting. It deals with motives and reactions that are probably out of their experience.

Tenuity and subtlety of plot are too frequently the chief characteristics of novel stories. The editor distrusts these as the merchant distrusts a new, unadvertised brand of cigars. A ready sale exists for the old brands, and naturally he does not wish to throw them out of his show case, the magazine, to make room for untried goods to which the public must be educated.

However—mark the distinction—the shopkeeper, as well as the editor, knows the importance of novelty as a means of stimulating

business. Thus, he may augment the appeal of his old reliable brands by including with every sale a profit-sharing coupon, or by an attractive window display featuring a standard product. The merchant is likely to be distrustful of a perfume put out by a new company. But suppose the manufacturer of a standard brand of toilet soap should put this same perfume on the market under his trade mark. The merchant is pretty certain to stock up with it. Why? He knows that the combination of something new, in connection with the old reliable firm name, is very likely to capture the public.

Magazine catering is subject to the commercial laws that govern any other business. The editor knows that certain lines of fiction goods—certain old plots, for example—can be relied upon. He makes them the foundation of his business. But he also knows that new ideas in connection with the selling of these plots are vitally necessary. Hence the cry for novelty.

“Give us new ideas for selling Latherine soap,” cries the manufacturer. “Give us new ideas for selling the old reliable plots,” echoes the editor.

We may respond by devising a new and attractive box for the marketing of the old soap, or by devising a new setting for the old plot—if it has been confined to the tropics, shift the scene to the north pole. We may respond by inventing a new and fragrant scent for the toilet soap, or by giving the old plot a new significance. We may respond to the manufacturer’s demand by employing a standard article as a premium to introduce an entirely new product, and we may satisfy the editor by using an old plot to carry across a more subtle subplot of undoubted originality.

Perhaps it is now clear that when editors say, “Be original,” they do not mean, “Devise far-fetched novelties for readers whose concern is with the commonplaces of everyday life.” They do mean: “Devise a good strong plot, with plenty of significance; be sure that your materials are fresh, not shopworn, and wrap them up in fresh, up-to-date language, instead of using old characters, old incidents, and old figures of speech.”

The writer who knows his business can "put across" any time-worn plot by letting it germinate in his mind until the possibilities become new to him. It is not the old plot that editors reject, so much as the old way of presenting it. You do not object to fruit salad for dinner on the ground that you have eaten fruit salad before; neither do you find uninteresting the "reward-of-virtue" plot because you have read it elsewhere. But you would feel aggrieved if you recognized in the salad the "left-overs" from a former meal. So, in writing, the materials must be fresh, even if the combination is in familiar proportions. The old plots will please us only when the scenes and characters are new.

Variety in our literary diet is always welcome—an occasional innovation in the manner in which our fiction potatoes are cooked. For good results writers and cooks alike need fresh materials—this is more essential than that the materials be of a new kind, to which the consumer's appetite must be educated.

Certain plots, it is true, have so cloyed the palates of readers that they have become unwelcome in editorial offices. So also certain sweets served at every meal cause us to sicken and want no more of them. As a result, we have the ban, or the near-ban, on the triangle story, the cub-reporter story, and others. Yet even these can be employed in moderation.

Be moderate then in seeking originality. The editorial demand is for something new, in spite of occasional appearances, and the writer who studies the situation will soon learn to steer a safe course between the rock of stale triteness on one hand and the whirlpool of too extreme novelty on the other.

THE ATTITUDE OF MIND

WHENEVER I am asked by students which is the most important thing in the writer's craft—plot, or style, or vivid characterization—I am tempted to reply: "None of these. The most important thing is The Attitude of Mind."

Of all factors in the way of a writer's success the heaviest is discouragement. No one is more subject to this cramping influence than the literary worker. To begin with, he or she is peculiarly temperamental. And few are the spirits resolute enough to stand up, for an extended period, to a succession of unvaried rejections—the inevitable lot of the beginning writer. Some students feel aggrieved because work which seems good to them is turned down by the editors, while those who have the discernment to see that their work is lacking in important qualities are in despair over their inability to reach the standard they desire to attain.

In cases where the discouragement is based upon inability to sell stories, it is easy to diagnose the difficulty. The writer who makes acceptances his whole purpose—who considers his time wasted unless it brings financial return—is rarely the one who achieves success. His joy is not sufficiently in the work itself.

For this writer, and for the more advanced soul whose despair is that his work never comes up to his own exacting standard, the same attitude of mind can profitably be cultivated. Realize this: It is positively as foolish for the writer to strain for power of narration as it would be for the third-grade schoolboy to fret for the time when he shall graduate and reach man's stature. In due course

of natural growth, the boy will inevitably reach his full stature; but no straining will appreciably hasten that time.

Physical growth, as we know, is dependent upon a proper admixture of food and exercise. If we are forced to lie motionless for an extended period, our unused muscles will atrophy. The boy can best aid his development into manly strength and stature by using his muscles in normal activities, and by taking such nourishment as his system demands. So it is that, to grow as a writer, one must have regular mental exercise of the proper kind. One must write and thereby develop the power to write. This is the universal law of growth. It is a normal, not a forced development, and the results are assured.

Knowing, then, that as long as he is exercising his faculties, such exercises will eventually bring him full power, why should any writer become discouraged? You would laugh at the ten-year-old boy who asserted gloomily: "I know I shall never be a man." So with the writer. Never make the foolish and illogical remark: "I know I shall never succeed at this rate." On the contrary, you can not help succeeding in good time, in the line along which you direct your growth.

The important thing is to cease anticipating the time of "arrival." As literary craftsmen, let us devote all our energies to making the best of present opportunities for exercise. Progress will be hampered, rather than advanced, by straining for recognition. Write as you would play a game. If your opponent bests you at tennis, do you feel that the time was wasted? Not if you are a true sportsman. Your interest was in the doing, not in the result. One who has acquired the proper poise studies his rejections without disappointment and tries to profit by his failures, because that is the way to develop skill. Serene in the consciousness that results will show in good time, he goes on writing and aiding his faculties in their normal development.

I like to think of a literary career as a long road winding pleasantly through groves and flower-dotted fields. It is an uphill road, to be sure, but eventually it reaches the crest of a height

where stand the gates of a splendid city—the City of Success. Now, there are two ways of traveling this road. Many of us see in it only a means of reaching the goal. So we struggle on toward the shining gates, and wear ourselves out in the frenzied endeavor to arrive, only to discover, after a long period of toil, that the distance was deceptive—the city seems as far away as ever. No wonder that many give up the struggle and fall by the wayside in discouragement.

That is the wrong way to undertake any journey. To set one's eyes on the goal, ignoring the nearer beauties, is to make the road uninteresting and interminable.

Suppose, on the contrary, that we look upon traveling the road as a pleasure jaunt. Our concern is not with arrival. We have undertaken the journey for its own sake—for the interesting experiences we may have along the way—for the pleasure of passing through shady groves and pausing to rest in daisy fields. With the true philosopher, each bit of writing is a delightful event—it means gathering flowers of experience by the wayside, and feeling another accession of the mental health and vigor that comes from moderate, unstraining effort.

And mark: Those of us who have followed the road thus pleasantly and in leisurely fashion, knowing that, without fail, steady progress will eventually bring us up at the destination, are by no means left behind in the pilgrimage. We pass many on the road who have struggled so hard to reach the goal that they have fallen, discouraged and exhausted. When some of the frantic strugglers do arrive, they are so weary and nerve-racked that they cannot enjoy what they have attained; or else they are in a condition to lose their balance as a result of the sudden realization of their desires.

Those of us who have followed the path with the right mental attitude arrive at the City of Success in good time. We are invigorated by the climb and in a fit condition temperately to enjoy what the city has to offer the traveler. We do not lose our heads and plunge into excess with the first taste of triumph, because we have

not lost much sleep over the prospect of arrival, and—well, to be frank, we are rather critical of the glaring city. We almost wish ourselves again on the shaded road, gathering flowers of experience—writing stories that always came back, though they meant, each one of them, a bit of our very life substance.

HAVE A STANDARD OF STYLE

IT GOES without saying that manuscripts submitted by student-writers should be correct in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and all mechanical details. Often, however, it is difficult to determine what is correct. Comparatively few standard publications, it may be noted, have the same rules of typography. One editor is an exponent of the simplified spelling, and the pages of his magazine bristle with "tho" and "thru" and other comparatively new forms. One magazine would write the phrase, "The Pennsylvania Railroad enters New York State," while another would publish it, "The Pennsylvania railroad enters New York state." One would say, "November 3rd," another "November 3d," another "November 3."

There are dozens of such points of difference, which frequently cause the writer confusion. It is impossible to satisfy everyone, when frequently the highest authorities differ. Nor is it necessary. If you submit a manuscript that does not come entirely within the office style, in case of acceptance the changes will be made in the editorial room. However, it is advisable to have a definite standard, and it should be a conservative, rather than an ultramodern standard which will find comparatively few sympathetic editors. Thus, in prose work, use "through," and "though"; put the apostrophe in "don't" and "can't," even though you will find magazines that spell "thru," "dont," etc.

The rules quoted below are from the *United Typothetae of*

America style book, used by a majority of printing offices in the United States as an aid to standardization. They touch chiefly points which difference of opinion, or lack of opinion, have made it necessary to standardize. The standard is a good one for writers, because it is consistent with that which will be followed by the majority of compositors in setting a piece of work, unless they are otherwise instructed. A manuscript prepared in accordance with these rules will be in good taste, even when submitted to a magazine that has a different style.

The "up" style is that which favors capitalizing in such cases as the "Southern Railroad," "Missouri River," etc., which in the "down" style would be written, "Missouri river," "Southern railroad," etc.

An Aid to Standardization.

CAPITALIZATION.

The office style is down except when special instructions to the contrary are given. Wayne county, Clyde river, New York Central railroad, state, president, etc. But capitalize the full corporate title when it is given: as, The Chicago & Northwestern Railroad Company.

Capitalize words designating definite regions: as, the Orient, the boundless West, the Gulf Coast. Lower-case eastern New York, northern Maine, etc.

Capitalize names of important events and things: as, the Reformation, the Revolution, the Middle Ages, the Union, the Government.

Capitalize the names of political parties: as, Republican, Democratic, etc.

Capitalize titles of nobility when referring to specific persons: as, the Prince of Wales.

Capitalize titles preceding names: as, President Roosevelt, Doctor Jones; but not the president of the Erie railroad.

Capitalize specific titles: as, Thank you, Professor; the Colonel will soon be here.

Capitalize Church, when used as opposed to the world.

Capitalize the principal words and the last word in titles of books, plays, lectures, pictures, and newspaper and magazine articles.

Capitalize fanciful names given to states, cities, etc.: as, the Keystone state; the Crescent city.

Capitalize First ward, Fifth street, Third regiment, etc.

In compound words capitalize each word, if it would be capitalized when standing alone.

Put a. m. and p. m. in lower-case.

Use capitals for genus and lower-case for species, as in *Staphylococcus pyogenes*, *Bacillus coli communis*, etc.

COMPOUNDS.

Fractions, when both numerator and denominator are less than twenty-one, should be compounded: as, one-half, three-tenths, etc. But when the word is used in speaking of a specific thing, omit the hyphen: as, One half of my page is leaded brevier and the other half solid six-point. When the numerator or denominator exceeds twenty, omit the hyphen: as, twenty thirty-seconds; fifteen sixty-fourths.

Use hyphens in all cases such as the following: Two-inch board, three-year-old colt, well-known man, 500-volt current, etc. Two words

used as a noun should either appear solid or with the hyphen, and it is not always easy to decide which form is the better: as, blood-vessels, germ-cells, sick-room, dining-car, finger-nail, composing-room, press-room. In a general way it may be said that when one or both words are of one syllable only, the tendency is to join them without the hyphen, while if they are of two or more syllables the hyphen is often used; but the above examples show that the usage is by no means uniform.

Make today, tomorrow, etc., one word.

DATES.

In dates omit d, th, and st, when the year is given: as, October 9, 1906. Use them when the year is omitted: as, the work must be shipped October 20th.

Make it 2d and 3d, not 2nd and 3rd.

In giving a series of two or more years express them thus: 1906-07, not 1906-7.

POSSESSIVE CASE.

Singular nouns ending in s take an apostrophe and another s to show the possessive case. King James's reign; Jones's scales; Bass's ale; Chambers's encyclopedia.

SPELL OUT.

Spell out the names of the months.

Spell out ages: as, twelve years.

Use figures in statistics: as, Of 152 operations, 76 died and 76 recovered.

In general, numbers containing less than three figures are to be spelled out, though when they occur in groups of three or more, use figures.

Spell out indefinite amounts.

Numbers containing fractions or decimals should be put in figures, as also should numbers denoting per cent.

Time of day should be put in figures, using a period between hours and minutes and a colon between minutes and seconds: as, 2.30 p. m.; 2:10 class. Periods of time, ages, and the like, must be spelled out: as, twenty-four hours, ten hours, etc.; except that when they occur in groups of three or more, use figures.

Spell out county, street, avenue.

QUOTATIONS.

Periods and commas following the last word of a quotation always precede the quotation marks. The other points precede them when the whole sentence is quoted, and follow them when the last word or clause is quoted.

ABBREVIATIONS.

Abbreviate military and civic titles when preceding a full name: as, Dr. John Smith; Gen. U. S. Grant. Spell them out when they do not precede a full name: as, Doctor Smith; Colonel Bryan.

Abbreviate Company when character & is used: as, A. J. Johnson & Co. When short & is not used, spell out Company: as, Lyons Printing Company.

Abbreviate names of states and territories following towns, except Alaska, Idaho, Iowa, and Utah.

Etc., not &c.

SPELLING.

Omit the final s in afterward, toward, upward, downward, etc.

Omit the final te in toilet.

Use er in diameter, fiber, meter, millimeter, centimeter.

Center, theater, etc., are the correct forms.

Use technique, not technic.

Use disk, not disc.

Spell dulness, fulness, instalment, etc.

PUNCTUATION.

The conjunction does not take the place of the comma in a series of words. "John, James, and Thomas are here;" "black, red, blue, and yellow were the colors selected;" are the correct forms.

Do not use a period after roman numerals, except when they mark paragraphs or other divisions.

Words and phrases inclosed in marks of parenthesis are to be punctuated according to the sense, and not by a set rule. Sometimes punctuation-marks are used before the first curve and inside the last one; sometimes but one mark is needed, in which case it will follow the second curve; sometimes no marks at all are required.

When a line closes with a colon do not use a dash also.

The Typothetae style book favors the use of the comma and dash together under certain conditions. Other authorities, however, which we indorse, say unequivocally:

A comma and a dash should not be used together.

“SNOWBALLING” A PLOT

BY the term “snowballing” a plot, I do not mean throwing things at it. No doubt, many plots need such drastic treatment, but in this case the phrase has been coined to express the process of rolling up ideas as a huge snowball is rolled, by turning the nucleus over and over, with an added accumulation at each revolution.

The experienced writer does not attempt the Herculean task of writing a story out of hand. There is an easy, simple way of going about plot building, as opposed to harder and more harrowing methods. Forcing their plots into premature crystallization is one of the mistakes of ambitious writers. Instead of rolling up a natural, symmetrical, well-packed ball of ideas, they punch their thoughts together into a lumpy, awkward, insecure mass.

Practically all successful authors have adopted the plan of turning their ideas over and over in order to perfect them. The principle lies behind many idiosyncrasies of genius. Charles Hoyt developed a play by repeatedly talking over the plot with long-suffering acquaintances. Each time, the outline would be slightly elaborated and strengthened. When it was, so to speak, rolled and packed to his satisfaction, he was ready to commence the actual composition.

Balzac’s method was to write out his ideas in preliminary form and then have them set up in type. When the proof sheet came from the printer, he would cut down, revise, and greatly elaborate —until there was no more room for insertions. This copy went again to the printer for correction and a new proof sheet was returned. Gradually, the nucleus would be rolled up into its final

form. No doubt, the author of the *Comedie Humaine* would have simplified his method, had he lived in this day of the typewriter.

Any "turning-over" process is likely to prove valuable. But the student-writer is often in the dark about beginnings. How is he to capture the germinal idea—the nucleus?

There are many ways. For the majority of writers, the best method is to begin with the theme; then to devise characters and incidents to prove the truth of the conception. I am convinced that the wrong way to go about fiction building is to look for actual incidents upon which to hang stories. The advice, "study the newspapers for plot suggestions," is responsible for two-thirds of the commonplace, mediocre stories with which the editors are bombarded. Read the newspapers—yes; be alert to what is going on; in every possible way, keep your ears attuned to life and human nature. But employ the insight thus gained for making your purely imaginary incidents convincing.

The only way in which, as a rule, an actual incident may be effectively employed in plot manufacture is to dissect the incident and extract the principle that it illustrates, then employ that as the theme of a purely imaginary story.

Let us, by way of illustration, set about to reproduce the mental process of "snowballing" a plot. As I write these lines, I have no notion what theme I will select for development, but I have a definite idea of the way to go about finding it. A calm, confident, unhurried attitude of mind is of great importance. The idea, once found, must be allowed to grow naturally and of its own accord, into a symmetrical story. Our part is to keep turning it over and over, so that an accumulation of ideas may have a chance to adhere to the basic conception.

The first essential, of course, is the idea. And, remembering that actual incidents are likely to make commonplace material, instead of culling over the yellow newspapers, or searching through our notebooks, we will look within ourselves for some thought of sufficient importance to be worthy of impressing on readers through the medium of fiction.

This basic idea, or theme, may be almost any abstract principle, ideal, or bit of philosophy. “When Fortune flatters, she does it to betray,” wrote Publius Syrus. This suggests the story of an unworthy man whose nature is betrayed by the use he makes of his money. “Mother love” is an abstract idea capable of illustration in many striking ways. “Intuition is more trustworthy than reason”—if you think so, prove your point by endowing a certain character with intuition, another with reason, and turning the conception over until it evolves into a plot.

A hundred such themes present themselves on the spur of the moment; they contain possibilities, but not all of them appeal to us as being our particular story—the one we wish to develop. We are exacting.

Let's see—suppose we develop a story on the subject of Heredity.” Come to think of it, though, that has been used a good many times in fiction, so the chances are that we would be wasting our effort upon it. Try again. For a good, live subject, how does the word “Preparedness” sound? Not so bad, as we consider it. Rightly handled, that word may serve as the nucleus for our snowball. Here it is, then, a tiny, compact ball of possibilities:

Preparedness.

Now for the initial turn over. The first thing we notice is that this word has two poles. We shall have to take a definite stand—our story must prove something. Are we for, or against?

It happens that we are neutral; but just to get started, we decide to make our story prove the “anti” side. The first roll of our snowball, thus, evolves it into this form:

The best protection is non-preparedness.

Second turn. Now begin to arise questions. What characters shall we select? In what setting shall we place the story? Shall we involve two European countries, or perhaps the United States and some other nation? Not if we are wise. That will take the subject entirely out of our reach—and anyway, this situation is what suggested our theme. The farther we get away from it, the more likely we shall be to maintain a clear perspective.

Short story unity of impression depends largely upon limiting the cast to the fewest possible characters. Our situation must be one involving not more than two or three persons. And the reader's interest must be centered, in particular, upon a certain one of these characters.

Let us take stock of our idea and its present accumulation:

The theme that the best policy is unpreparedness is to be illustrated by a small cast centering around one character. This character is to pursue the policy of unpreparedness and to win out by it in a situation that ordinarily would be met with armed resistance.

Third turn. This does not as yet look much like a story; still, it is quite an elaboration upon our original snowball. At least, we know what general type of situations and characters are needed.

Now, it will be a good plan to consider several tentative settings and situations:

Suppose we place the scene in "big S" Society. A number of debutantes may be arming themselves with feminine weapons of conquest, the object being preparedness for the attack when a titled foreigner comes wife hunting. Surely there is a story in the capture of this lion by a simple little maiden who has been too artless (or artful, as the case may be) to prepare for conquest.

But that does not altogether suit us; some better use of the material may suggest itself. Suppose we transpose the gender and shift the scene from Society to frontier. Surely, if unpreparedness is capable of standing the test, it will have good opportunity of doing so in a typical mining camp, where every man carries a gun and is prepared to use it at an instant's notice. Among all these hair-trigger natures, a "Prince of Peace" who refuses to decorate his person with hardware, may be a unique personality. We might have him confronted by armed bandits while carrying a fortune in gold down an unfrequented trail. It seems not impossible to devise a working out of this situation in which his unarmed position saves his own life and enables him to retain the gold.

Or, we might transpose the scene to the University. Picture the "grind" who is studying night and day in preparation for after life, while his frivolous roommate, who does not believe in pre-

paredness, has a good time. According to the fable of the Grasshopper and the Ants, the grind is due to come out on top; but it will not be difficult for us to write a story in which the roommate, who devoted less time to preparation, stumbles into the fat, responsible position, while the grind becomes one of his clerks.

But that is old; the probability is that George Ade has at some time made better use than we can of the material.

We might lay the scene on the border of Mexico, letting an unprotected American save himself and his family by means of a striking policy of disarmament. Or we might—

But, after all, the mining camp suggestion contains good possibilities for a vital illustration of our theme. We may tentatively decide upon it and proceed with our rolling process. This is how we now stand:

That unpreparedness is the best protection is to be proven in a gold-camp setting, by a hero who refuses to adopt preparedness. While burdened with treasure, he is confronted by bandits. The situation is such that, if he had been armed, he would have been killed. As a direct result of being unarmed, he escapes both with his life and his treasure.

Fourth turn. That phrase, "As a direct result of being unarmed," is important. The story must satisfy this condition. If there is no clear connecting link between our hero's escape and his lack of arms, our anti-preparedness demonstration will fall flat.

We know now that our hero is going to get the best of the highwaymen through being unarmed; but the details are slow in materializing. However, the preliminary situation is not difficult to imagine. It has, so to speak, adhered to our nucleus without any particular effort on our part. We begin to visualize the situation. There must be a central character, the advocate of nonpreparedness. And his presence seems to call for a contrast with some more warlike character who is violently in favor of "gun toting." It is easy to imagine these two as partners, riding along with the treasure between them—arguing the question of its safe transport. The hero advocates leaving all weapons at home. His partner has insisted upon stocking up with artillery. They arrive at a dangerous pass, where their theories are put to the test. Opposed by a

superior force, their fight seems certain to be a losing one. So we have an opportunity to compare the tactics in actual practice.

This has been quite a turn over. Let us pause and warm our hands, while proudly surveying the present state of our snowball.

Steve Anti, and his partner, Scotty Pro, are wending their way to town, heavily laden with gold dust from their rich placer in the hills. Buck McGinnis and his band of outlaws are known to be at large in the neighborhood. Buck's reputation is a fright! He openly flaunts a trophy consisting of a huge diamond plucked from the necktie of a capitalist tenderfoot. Steve Anti laments the display of hardware he has been persuaded to hang around his belt, protesting that it simply invites attack. Scotty has never heard such foolishness! How are they going to protect their gold in case some one else wants it! The argument waxes warm, but remains unsettled, when they approach Dead Man's Gulch, where the outlaws are known to lie in wait. Unable to agree as to a mode of procedure, the two decide to part company. The gold is divided and distributed inconspicuously about the person of each man. Then Steve passes his rifle, his revolver, and his ammunition, over to Scotty, whose warlike nature fairly revels in being thus doubly armed. They draw lots. The winner is to take the lead, the other to follow fifteen minutes behind him. Neither, in any circumstance, is to jeopardize his share of the gold by coming to the other's assistance in case of trouble.

Our snowball is getting cumbersome now. Already we have the scene, the characters, and a stage all set for the climax. The nature of that climax is clearly in mind, but we are hazy about details. The best plan, since our characters seem to have come to life so readily, and to be displaying such marked individuality, is to follow them. Maybe the author will learn something from his creations. Already we have commenced to have a lot of respect for Steve Anti. He seems such an original thinker—and look at the risk he is taking, just for the sake of an ideal. We suspect that he will prove thrillingly audacious in a pinch. Let's see, he is tall and sinewy, and he looks like a Christy hero, except that the razor slipped a couple of times as he was hacking loose a month's growth of whiskers before starting to town. He has the eyes of a dreamer combined with the firm chin of action; and something about his mouth suggests a keen sense of humor. As for Scotty—well, though he wasn't thought of in time for the leading role, still we can't help a sneaking sympathy for the man. He's certainly full of ginger. One look at his bristling red hair—he took no chances with the

razor—is enough to tell us he's spoiling for a fight. Knowing our climax in advance, of course we realize that Scotty hasn't a chance at the show-down, and it is a trifle difficult not to feel sorry for him. If Scotty knew this, he would scornfully tell us to save our pity for the outlaws.

Time's up. Now for another look at our snowball.

The toss-up results in giving Steve Anti the first chance to find out the truth regarding a Hereafter. Stripped of all defensive weapons, he rides forth; even his coat has been abandoned, in order that his absolute unpreparedness may be apparent at a glance. A solidly filled belt of gold is the only object surrounding his waist. He rides through the pass and is not in any way molested. His psychology begins to look reasonable. Why should bandits attack a man who obviously has nothing about him worth carrying a weapon to defend? So he—

But this fraction of a turn makes us realize that the climax of our story is going to be without dramatic action. We are proving our point in altogether too peaceful and uneventful a way. It will never do to disappoint the reader, who has been led to think there will be a real encounter with bandits. We now must contrive to bring them on the scene. Amended, our outline therefore reads:

Steve rides through the pass but a short distance, when he is suddenly confronted by half a dozen armed bandits. They are strangers to him, but he recognizes the dreaded Buck McGinnis by the famous diamond flashing from his shirt front. "Stop and give an account of yourself!" is the terrible command. Steve obeys, though he regrets that those who make the request belong to the dark ages of preparedness. "Seen anything of a sorrel horse?" inquires Steve nonchalantly, rolling a cigarette.

There being no show of resistance, the highwaymen are not quite sure it is worth their while to parley with this stranger. Steve dismounts. "Where you going?" demands McGinnis. "Thought I'd take a look down this gully," responds Steve, as he starts off. The bandits glance at one another. "Come back," yells McGinnis. "Your sorrel ain't down there. Jump on your nag and hurry—get to blazes out o' here!" So Steve, apparently against his will, is not only passed up by the gang as unworthy their prowess, but even assisted on his way. They don't want him around.

A short distance down the road, he draws rein, listening tensely. There it comes! A sudden rattle of shots. He knows that Scotty is putting up a good fight, but the odds against him make the result a foregone conclusion. Steve, forgetful of the compact, spurs his horse to the aid of his unfortunate partner. But the shots suddenly cease—it is all over. Sadly, Steve resumes his townward journey. How foolish to make an arsenal of oneself, thus inviting destruction!

Arrived at his destination, he enters a thirst emporium and breaks

the news. It is sad news, for Scotty was well liked by these rough miners and frontiersmen. "Poor Scotty," murmurs many a voice, as our story comes to a close. "He was a mighty fine little cuss—but too all-fired 'prepared' for a scrap to get along well in this world."

So there we have the final roll of the snowball. It can be given much further polishing, and the actual narration is still to be accomplished; but our nucleus has truly developed into a definitely rounded story. The point has been clearly illustrated— But whoa, Bill!

Our snowball has taken another complete flop, before we could prevent. Who walks into the thirst emporium, and into the story again, but the late lamented Scotty! We stare with eyes as wide as any frontiersman present, including Steve—but if that isn't Scotty, staggering in the door under two rifles and a wagon load of belts and ammunition, it certainly is his earth-bound spirit. That he isn't an apparition quickly becomes apparent.

"Gimme whiskey and make it straight!" he roars, in approved western style. "I'm dying o' thirst." He glares around balefully, until his eyes light on the open-mouthed Steve. "Why the Sam Hill didn't you come back and give me a lift with all this junk?" he demands. "Whadda you think I am—a pack mule?"

So saying, he disburdens himself of half a dozen well-filled money belts, enough revolvers to supply the whole camp, and last, but not least, Buck McGinnis's much-flaunted diamond. "Run out, some o' you scum," he barks, setting down the emptied glass, "and see if the batch o' hosses I corralled on the way down is tied fast to the hitching bar. I had too big a thirst to make sure."

It is a shame; Scotty ought not to have done it; but he was a trouble-maker from the first. Remember how he broke into the cast when he wasn't even considered in the original line-up, and how he made us have a sort of sneaking liking for him in spite of his taking the wrong side of the argument? Now, at the last, he comes bursting in to take away all the hero's laurels. He's a rank usurper.

But it is to be feared we'll have to leave him in, because the one unpardonable sin in plot making is to let your story come out exactly as it seems destined to. Prove your point, yes; but also watch your opportunity to introduce some twist at the conclusion which gives the whole subject an altered complexion.

Such, in brief, is a good working illustration of "snowballing" a

plot. Far from being difficult, it is as easy as one desires to make it—and intensely interesting. Let a day or so elapse for each turning over if desired. Then, in the evening, write down just as much or as little as has accumulated around the idea since the last time it was reduced to paper. We couldn't have jumped at once from the nucleus idea to the final story, "A Matter of Preparedness." So we put down what we knew of the story, then turned it over until something more came to mind, and kept up the process until a stage was reached when the idea came to life and we were startled to find that our abstract thought had grown into a full-fledged story outline, complete even to the twist in the conclusion.

The chief objection that may be urged against this illustration is that it evolves possible loss of artistic unity. The contention, if true, does not alter the effectiveness of the plot-making recipe, which the not too temperamental writer will find exceedingly dependable. Modified to suit the individual needs of the writer, it may prove a developer of inspiration.

But as to the story outline here "snowballed" into shape: What becomes of the artistic unity when we give it the twist? The story does not prove the theme with which we began, nor does it prove the opposite. In fact, the purpose of the illustration was not so much to prove the original theme as to reach a destination. The original theme served its purpose in providing a starting point. Whatever value the illustration possesses is due to the fact that in writing it I set down the reasoning as it came to me, starting with an open mind and desirous only to evolve a story—to show a plot in process of creation. Toward the last came the suggestion: "There's a chance for surprise in letting Scotty unexpectedly win out." Presto! the original theme was abandoned. It had served its purpose by furnishing the nucleus for a story. The suggested twist made it possible to illustrate a theme that is more universally true, more significant, than the original conception. It may be expressed: "Any strong policy vigorously carried through will be successful—it all depends on the individual."

The arguments for and against stories with twisty conclusions, it seems to me, simmer down to this: We find cheap twists and strong, significant twists in fiction, just as we see good poetry and doggerel, good and bad art of every description. Certainly the twist or surprise ending is a forceful aid in the marketing of fiction.

THE STONE WALL OF TALENT

THE most puzzling queries that reach the literary confessional are from writers who have attained a degree of success and find it impossible to overcome the limitations that prevent them from rising higher. A quotation illustrative of the point is here given:

Is it strange, or isn't it, that I should know so well what I want to do and yet be so utterly unable even to approximate it? It seems so to me. To write stories that sell isn't much of a trick. But to write a real story—well, such a story as Rupert Hughes's "Don't You Care"—is something entirely different. That's what I want to do, the only branch of literature that I really care anything about, and I can't even make a start in the right direction. And I feel the stories, too. I can picture them in my mind, even tell them quite acceptably to a sympathetic listener; but when I try to put them on paper I flounder about helplessly for a time, then give up and write one of the mechanical yarns that I know how to handle. Probably the thing I thought was a call to write was some other noise. Heaven knows I have tried; but there is a barrier that I have never been able to break down.

Here is another, which, like the first, is from a writer whose work is in regular demand by leading fiction magazines:

I have been writing six years now; still, today, I am in a position no more secure than when I first began writing. That is, when I send a story on its way to a magazine which he bought dozens of my efforts, I am no more sure of its selling than I was six years ago. I know a short-story plot, and know it pretty well. My strongest point, I have been told by editors who are in a position to know, is characterization. My technique is almost perfect—far more so than that of nine-tenths of the big writers who appear every week in the big magazines. Still, I totter uncertainly all the time. What's the matter?

My stories teem with atmosphere; and, moreover, they have plots. Still they come back from the big magazines with the remark: "Fails to appeal."

This appeal business is the kernel of the whole matter. Appeal is a subtle something which cannot be laid off with a ruler. And, if you'll

pardon me for seeming to advise, that's what you must look for in a story from a writer of my experience more than anything else. I can attend to the plot fairly well. Also the characterization, local color, etc. But to any one who can show me wherein my stories fail to "appeal" I shall be everlastingly grateful.

And in contrast with writers who have worked hard and are willing to pay the price for that subtle something, yet find themselves confronted by a seemingly impassable barrier, we see others who unaccountably leaped into leading magazines with their first stories, or forged to the front within a few short months.

This leads to a reopening of the old inquiry into the difference between talent and genius; for it may be admitted that a writer who can regularly turn out salable fiction is talented, while one who soars above him is equipped with something more—something that may be called genius.

A clever writer can take the elements of real life as they have come under his observation and weave a good story out of them. The technique will be faultless, the characters true to life, the incidents probable, the theme significant, the denouement effective—to repeat, it is a good story.

Nevertheless, this good story lacks something—a something which drives the creator nearly frantic at times because he can not define or instil the missing ingredient. If it were supplied, the tale would be a work approaching genius—but with this deficiency it remains merely a "good story."

The missing factor is breadth of vision. No writer can put into his stories more of life than he sees, and this author happens to be so constructed as to see no more than other men may see. Like the dwellers in the Happy Valley which Doctor Johnson created for "Rasselas," he is hemmed in by an impenetrable circle of limiting cliffs. His feet are confined to the earth, and, though he may be more observant and shrewder than his audience, he can see only that side of a wall which he happens to be facing; his horizon is no wider than that of the average mind.

His pictures of life are unsurpassed until along comes another man with equal powers of observation, equal facility for descrip-

tion—and the added advantage of a flying machine. The wings of this new observer enable him to soar with ease over the wall of ordinary limitations. He is not confined to the observation of what lies on one side of a wall; he does not need to speculate on what lies outside of the valley, for he is in a position to know.

This fortunate writer puts such charm and richness into his pictures of life that they immediately thrill his readers. His comments upon men and events open up a new world to the ordinary vision. Matters that must be as sealed mysteries to the rest of humanity are clear as day to this soaring spirit. Not because he is more clever at inventing explanations, but because he sees more.

Nor should this faculty be confused with imagination. The ordinary observer may have vivid powers of imagination, in the sense that he can invent characters and incidents that are unusual and yet true to life. Our friend with the flying machine may have no imagination whatever. He does not need it, for he perceives and knows. When he tells us a thing, he speaks as one having authority.

His perspective is better. He sees into the future with a sureness that baffles one who can not comprehend the wider vision which is the source of his information. The outcome of a battle, for instance, he may predict with certainty. The man on the ground knows only one factor of the situation—the army with which he happens to be connected. The opposing general may have a much larger force than he estimates, and there may be a deep trench—as there was when Napoleon ordered the disastrous charge which cost him the battle of Waterloo—that will play havoc with the ordinary observer's plans. The flying scout's elevation enables him to know all factors, the comparative size of the forces opposed to each other, and the physical obstacles between them. Hence he may predict in advance the outcome of the battle—he may go further and suggest a definite plan for determining the result.

It seems hardly necessary to explain how this applies to the writer. Evidently genius is a matter of that insight which comes with superior powers of vision. The man who has developed the power of soaring above his kind and bringing down the results of

his observations may find expression as a prophet or seer; or he may be an artist, a power in the financial world, a wonderful musician—a writer. As a writer, he will see over the wall of outward appearances, penetrating to the soul of things; his treatment of character and incident will be fuller and richer than that of the equally discerning man on the ground.

In actual practice, this works out somewhat as follows: The talented writer takes certain characters, fitting to each definite attributes of human nature. Having thus defined his creatures, he puts them in a situation and allows them to work out their destiny. His work is cleverly done and it convinces. The reader feels: "Yes, that is a logical development of the situation. A man of that type would do just the thing this hero does; he would act in that way under certain conditions, and in the opposite way when a new factor is added to the situation. It is all consistent with human nature as we know it."

As we know it! Ah, there's the rub. The author has told his story in terms with which everybody is familiar. It is clever and convincing—but not enlightening. It is the work of a man whose feet are on the ground. When he looks at a stone wall, he sees nothing but the bare exterior.

The same story, if illumined by the touch of genius, will deal with motives and character reactions that are beyond the ordinary insight. The story will be consistent, not only with human nature as we know it, but as the gods know it. Though we of ordinary intellect are unable to comprehend to the full these deeper pictures, we may *feel* the richness and power involved. A story of the merely clever type is based altogether on things about human nature that we already know—that we all have the same "hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions," that if you prick us we bleed, if you tickle us we laugh, if you poison us we die, and if you wrong us we shall revenge—while a story told by one of deeper insight will prove to us things about this same human nature that we did not know—new things, that at the same time are convincingly true. We can read such a story over and over, each time

grasping a little more of the fundamentals it teaches. It is this richness, translated into the reader's sense of repletion with the mental feast laid before him, that constitutes *appeal*.

The writer who possesses the necessary insight—almost a clairvoyant insight—into realities illumines any subject he undertakes to develop; he can not help it. To him, there is nothing remarkable in treating an old subject from a new and fascinating angle. He saw it from that angle, and has merely put down his impressions. It is, in fact, a mystery to him how others can be more limited in vision—that “having eyes, they see not.” To him, for instance, such an obstacle as an encircling stone wall of outward character is merely a sort of boundary line. Looking down inside, he sees not only more sides of the wall than can be viewed by the nonsoaring observer, but even the life-teeming interior—the beauty and significance of the character as a whole. No wonder we say of such a writer: “He has the faculty of making commonplace people and subjects interesting.

How absurd it would be to speak of Balzac, or Shakespeare, or Zola, or Thackeray, or Tolstoy, or Dickens, and their fellow giants as “clever,” “original,” “talented”! Their cleverness and originality were not superior to the normal—perhaps inferior. Their technique was often a hodgepodge. They were *seers*. What they saw in life frequently was put down roughly, but it was more than the ordinary writer or reader can see for himself, and so it has lived. We read their works because they lift us from the ground and show us life as they saw it from their supervantage point.

So, of course, any writer who rises above the rank and file in our day does so because he possesses in some degree the higher insight—a searching, clairvoyant, illuminating faculty—that makes his stories appealing. The author has caught a glimpse of some truth beyond the ordinary ken, and, perhaps only vaguely and in a fragmentary manner, has incorporated this insight into the type of story in which he specializes. Ring W. Lardner, for instance, caught the knack of laying bare the peculiar quirks and mental attitude of an illiterate and seemingly commonplace type of char-

acter. He looked within, instead of at the exterior, and the result is that hundreds of thousands enjoy his typical "You know me Al" yarns. Pelham G. Wodehouse, whose rapid coming to the front has aroused comment in the magazine world, succeeded in putting something indefinitely new into old, familiar problems. The novelty consists, perhaps, of no more than taking a light, whimsical view of his subjects, instead of the ordinary serious view—but his stories have a degree of depth and appeal. Writers of the popular stamp owe much to their cleverness and technique, but it is the touch of higher insight that accounts for their rise above equally clever fellow craftsmen. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Beyond thus pointing out the difference between those whose work merely interests or entertains and those who have that subtle quality, appeal, one can not advance very far. There are few reliable recipes for attaining seership. But this, at least, can be asserted: What one man has developed, others have latent or partly awakened within them. Any writer who can appreciate a masterpiece and see that his own work lacks some of its elements has it in him to develop at least the wings of minor seership.

One method of encouraging this development is to read the works of the masters, not for their technique, but for their insight. In such reading, the consciousness is temporarily raised and the vision extended. Occasionally the reader may put a suggestion of the higher vision thus gained into his own work.

The best recipe of all is: Try, and continue trying, to express those stories that you *feel*. One drawback in case of the writer who has attained a degree of success through his cleverness is that his attempts to follow another line of development are likely to prove absurdly weak and abortive. The writer who has thus made an effort to express his higher vision is appalled at his own crudity—appalled as a novice would not be. He reasons that evidently such types of fiction are hopelessly out of his line—so goes back to the old reliable brand which he can handle with confidence. If he had been content to pass through a period of awkward flapping, he might have developed power beyond his dreams.

The writer who has not yet found himself, even to the extent of grasping the knack of cleverly manufacturing effective tales, should bear in mind that technique, imagination, and ingenuity can take him only so far. They are limited attributes. Unless he wishes to find himself, after a certain period, facing an impenetrable stone wall, let him keep in mind always the purpose of developing a deeper insight than the ordinary into character, humanity, and destiny. Study of the masters and constant endeavor to see through appearances and outward forms—these are necessary parts of the training for authorship.

WHY STRIVE FOR UNITY

UNITY is an artificial quality, yet justly indispensable to the artist. Many a piece of literature fails because its strength is diffused. This is likely to be true of the story built around an incident from real life, because actual events lack the unity that is demanded of fiction.

Fiction is organized life. It is organized for a direct attack on the mind of the reader. A strong story owes much of its appeal to the fact that extraneous matters are eliminated, and developments held in leash until the climax moment, then allowed to take the reader by assault. The author who tells his story without regard for unity may be likened to a general who sends a few men at a time against the enemy. Each little assault is easily repelled. It makes no impression on the opposing force, and by the time the general has exhausted his material he has nothing to show for it.

The skilful author-general holds back his forces until he can take the reader by surprise. Suddenly he releases his whole army in one grand charge, which sweeps everything before it.

Think of your story as contained in the climax. Save everything for the final massed attack on the reader's defenses.

Frequent causes of diffused interest are:

First, the title. Sometimes a title will contain such a bald statement of what the story is about that the reader loses interest before he begins. Example: "Jimmy Captures a Burglar." Why should we read further, when the title has told us what happened?

The careful author tantalizes the reader by keeping him "guessing." One means of doing this is a curiosity-arousing, nonrevealing title. The one above mentioned might be phrased, "Jimmy and the Burglar," which leaves what happened between them in doubt.

Next comes the viewpoint. Rarely is a good argument advanced in favor of the shifting viewpoint. It may be excusable in certain stories, but it is a makeshift which has a tendency to be weakening. It means that the author-general is dividing his forces. Concentrate—focus the reader's interest from first to last on the incidents as viewed from the angle of a single dominant character—usually the one chiefly concerned in the climax.

Then there is the time element. Have you developed your story by a series of new starts such as: The next day he—One morning she—A month later they—Next time he motored to town his—and the like? If so, you have been sending out your forces in small battalions. An editor would term the story episodic. With each break in time, the reader must begin over and acquire interest in a new incident. Each juncture is a place of leakage. Plan your story so that there are the fewest possible lapses of time. For the average short-story, three fresh beginnings strain the limit. A story developed according to the outline for "A Matter of Preparedness" in a preceding chapter would be effective in this respect, because the action would cover but a few hours, without definite break.

The episodic story usually can be unified. Take as many as possible of the early incidents and weave them into one continuous happening. Then turn over to the conclusion and gather the last several scenes into an unbroken succession of incidents. "Bunch" the "in-between" incidents similarly, or use them for connecting material.

Thus, the story may depend on a succession of incidents such as this: Thieves break into George's hencoop. The next day George goes to town and buys a gun. The following night he hears a noise in the hencoop and runs out, but the robbers have escaped. Three nights later, instead of going to bed, he lies in wait for them and springs out in time to make a capture.

Now the same succession of incidents may be worked into a continuous, instead of an episodic, narrative, the action covering a few hours with no pronounced lapses of time. Gathering them up so, we have the following:

George returns home late one evening after buying a gun. We learn by retrospect that thieves have been bothering his hencoop of late. Just as he is getting ready for bed, he hears a suspicious noise and hastens out. He finds no sign of the robbers, so goes back into the house; but instead of retiring, he slips out of the front door, around to the rear, and lies in wait. When the thieves return, he springs from concealment and captures them.

Unity of setting is closely allied to unity of time. Not only should the incidents be as nearly continuous as possible, but they should, generally speaking, occur without overmuch shifting from one place to another. A study of the drama will prove definitely helpful to the author who desires to obtain unity of composition, because the writer for the stage is usually compelled to concentrate all the action possible into from one to four continuous scenes.

Sometimes diffusion is the result of making two or three crises out of what should form the material for a single climax. Take a typical form of detective story. The elements are: A crime has been committed, but the identity of the criminal is unknown. The detective-hero determines to effect a capture, and he is anxious to get ahead of a rival detective. This is a timeworn situation, but it will serve for illustration.

The elements of the problem are three: Who committed the crime? Will the criminal be captured? Which detective will effect the capture?

A threefold problem makes possible three different crises, which may be strung out one after another. First, the hero may discover the criminal's identity; second, the rival detective may abandon the chase; third, the criminal may be captured by the hero.

But this is a foolish division of our forces. With the passing of the first crisis one element of suspense is lost; with the passing

of the second two-thirds of the suspense evaporates; only one element remains. The result of this disorganized attack on the reader's interest is the direct reverse of cumulative intensity.

It will be far better to combine the three in one for the most crushing attack possible. Let the rivalry between the detectives be keen up to the last minute, thus keeping the reader in doubt as to who, if either, is going to make the capture; and let the hero's final coup result simultaneously in the unmasking and the capture of the criminal.

In actual life, such a problem would be likely to resolve itself by degrees, as first outlined. But it is no distortion of life to combine the elements of the unfoldment so that they come out together and intensify each other. No matter how dramatic an event in real life may be, usually there is a possible combination of its elements—apparent to the artist's eye—which would have made its effect a little more telling.

This illustration has particular reference to the short-story. In long fiction it is necessary to have several successive crises; but each should be a concentration of all the suspense elements in a particular passage. Thus, if your aim is a crisis every two thousand words, try to save the elements for a "big bang" at the end of the two thousand, instead of distributing their force through the entire chapter.

Some stories owe their lack of unity to characters or incidents which are unnecessary. A closely knit story is one that has been reduced to its lowest possible terms. The best way to ascertain whether a thread of narrative is essential to the story is to outline a version in which it is omitted.

To illustrate by means of a simple example: Two friends, Fred and Al, fall in love with the same girl. Al, finding that she loves Fred, quarrels with him. Fred hesitates to ask the girl to marry him, because he is poor, while she is wealthy. Discovering this, she pretends to lose her money, whereat Fred proposes and is accepted. Al comes to Fred after it is over, admits that the best man has won, and the friendship is renewed.

Now this outline, on examination, contains unnecessary incidents and an unnecessary character. Eliminate Al, and the real story still remains; it is comprised in the sentences: "Fred hesitates to ask the girl to marry him, because he is poor, while she is wealthy. Discovering this, she pretends to lose her money, whereat Fred proposes and is accepted." The climax concerns only these two, therefore they are the only characters needed. The relations of Al and Fred have nothing to do with the story.

Unity is nine-tenths of technique. The foregoing are but a few of the more important ways in which unity must enter into the construction of an effective story.

THE PRECIPICE OF SUSPENSE

IT has been pointed out that plot is based upon problem and solution. But why do we require a problem? In order to create doubt, uncertainty, suspense. The technique of fiction thus resolves itself into the creation of suspense. Without a problem, there is no suspense; without suspense, there is no interest—no “punch.”

Suspense is the element that tightens the grip of a plot. It prevents us from accepting what happens in an impersonal, matter-of-fact way. In its working it is altogether emotional.

A good way of attaining plot suspense is to keep constantly in mind the analogy of a blindfolded man picking his way along the edge of a precipice. With every step that brings him nearer to the brink, the suspense, from a spectator’s point of view, becomes more keen. So, likewise, when a reader is made to feel that a character is heading to destruction, the grip of the situation increases. When he approaches within a few inches of the brink, something unusual is required to distract our fascinated attention. A misstep, a stumble! we forget to breathe. The character rights himself with an effort, and we are relieved. But only for a moment. Another step, and again he stumbles. Frantically he struggles to regain his footing; it is useless, and with a final scramble, he plunges over the ledge.

This point of intensity in the story marks the climax. Of course, the solution of the problem demands that the character shall be saved from destruction. There must be a snowdrift at the bot-

tom to break his fall, or a projecting root which he seizes as he goes over, thus relieving the suspense at its maximum.

The principle of this analogy may be applied to every form of fiction. In the pure adventure tale, the precipice may be any dangerous situation. In an industrial story, it may stand for business ruin. The steps toward the brink are those successive bolts of misfortune which make a financial crash the more inevitable. The final failure corresponds to the plunge over the cliff—and the providential snowbank is replaced by some business turn that converts ruin into triumph.

In the modern problem story, the heroine may totter on the brink of deserting her husband for another man. He is her precipice; if she yields to the fascination and makes the contemplated misstep, ruin will be spelled for her. And when she leaps—but, of course, there will be a saving incident to surprise and relieve the reader.

In the illustration employed for “‘Snowballing’ a Plot,” the precipice was the danger of capture. When Steve was surrounded by the outlaws, he tottered on the brink. The projecting root that saved him was his policy of unpreparedness. Scotty, too, went over the precipice, and the unexpected happened.

Many a well-conceived but strangely ineffective story needs such intensification as is contained in this suggestion. Probably the author introduced the saving complication too soon—the reader had not yet become sufficiently worried over the impending fate of the character. A rescue while the hero is still some distance from the brink will never be as effective as one that comes while he is actually toppling over.

Again, the story may fail because the reader was not made to feel that the character was approaching disaster. It will not do to write a story about a pleasure jaunt, then tack on a stumble over the edge of a precipice in the last few paragraphs. Keep the impending danger before the reader from the opening to the concluding paragraphs.

It may be that the story fails because the saving feature is too

obvious. Knowing that there is a snowbank at the base, we can not be aroused to great apprehension as the plunge is made.

And finally, perhaps the story fails because the characters have not been made personally interesting. The hero is so lacking in vividness that we do not care whether he falls over the brink or not.

This brings us to the strongest of all methods of attaining suspense, the "character" method, in which the personal element is employed as an intensifier. The author makes it a point to win the reader's sympathy for the character involved—knowing that in such sympathy he obtains a tremendous leverage on the emotions.

Tell a mother that her baby has fallen down the well; the result will be a vivid flash of emotion. Nowhere near the same intensity of feeling would result if we said: "Ten thousand soldiers are being killed today in the European trenches." The latter tragedy impresses the reason as more momentous than the death of an individual; but reason has nothing to do with the emotional grip of a story. We feel more concerned over the fate of one who is personally dear to us than over the fate of ten thousand strange soldiers.

Suspense, then, depends very strongly on character drawing. The more liking has been aroused for the characters, the stronger our emotional reaction to whatever may happen to them. As an author, don't assume that the reader is going to care that John kissed Joan beneath the grape arbor. Kisses are commonplace—unless we care! So the first thing necessary is to make us like Joan and John. When we have become interested in them through their speech and actions, the kissing episode will have a personal meaning to us. Or reverse the situation and make John a rascal. Because we care for Joan, the scene will arouse our emotions; it will matter vitally to us whether she is kissed, and who performs the deed.

If the heroine has been made sufficiently interesting to the reader, a passage descriptive of her hesitation over the gown she shall wear to dinner may be intensely absorbing.

In making the character appeal vivid, the necessity for limiting the cast of a story should be clearly borne in mind. The interest

of a situation loses its edge as it is scattered. If you wish to make the reader feel the full horrors of war, instead of describing the annihilation of a regiment, bring home to us the frightfulness by telling of a pet kitten caught in the vortex of battle, or of a child, a crippled veteran, a soldier's wife—some individual victim with whom we can enter into full sympathy. Humanity in the mass becomes impersonal. Only the intellect can vibrate in sympathy with a collective institution, while it is in the realm of emotion that suspense holds sway. Many a strong, well-conceived—but, alas, unpublished—piece of fiction has failed because it involved chiefly two nations at war with each other, or two social factions, instead of one or two strongly individualized characters.

It is a combination of character appeal and intensity of incident that vivifies suspense to the compelling point. Each strengthens the other. The interest that may have been aroused in the characters is intensified by putting them in a very tight fix, and a striking event becomes more striking if we are personally interested in the characters. Even a stranger becomes an object of interest if he happens to be hanging by the tips of his fingers from the fourth-story window of a burning building; but suppose that the man happens to be a dear friend—and observe the increased emotional strain.

The question often arises: Shall the reader be fully acquainted with the nature of the danger threatening the hero, or shall he be mystified until the trap is sprung at the climax? For example, he may be fighting a band of outlaws. One form of suspense will consist in telling the reader exactly what the plans of the outlaws are; we shall see them slowly stealing upon the hero, while he remains unconscious of his danger. The other form will consist in keeping the reader as well as the hero in ignorance of the enemy's plans. Which is the more effective?

It depends altogether on the individual instance. The grip of the first form of suspense is in the apparent certainty of disaster; the grip of the second form is in the uncertainty. As a general thing, uncertainty makes for greater suspense than certainty.

FIXING THE VIEWPOINT

GREATERT confusion exists with reference to viewpoint than to any other technical feature of short-story development. Writers are continually advised to employ the single and to avoid the shifting viewpoint; but more stories suffer from error or uncertainty in this particular than from any other ailment.

Certain authorities have gone the length of asserting that the single viewpoint should never be violated. I would hardly make so broad a statement. Superficially, at least, a large proportion of stories published in good magazines violate its principles. But the beginning writer makes a serious mistake in assuming that he can afford to employ the shifting viewpoint because a well-known author does so. The experienced story-teller "gets by" with a tale so handled, because he possesses exceptional finesse. He corresponds to the trained ropewalker, whose skill enables him to cross a chasm on a slender strand of hemp that would be likely to send an amateur funambulist headlong to disaster.

Viewpoint, in fiction, means exactly what it does in ordinary life. It is the position of one who views the incidents. In reading a story, we naturally assume the viewpoint that the author took in writing it, just as in looking at a photographed scene we instinctively assume the position which the camera occupied in recording it.

The single viewpoint, as usually defined, is that of some one person in the story. The author assumes the identity of that character and so, reflectively, does the reader. The most obvious example of the single viewpoint is, of course, found in the first-person

story, in which the author relates the experiences as if they were his own. Thus:

I sat for some time before my window, musing on the strange disclosure that my friend had just made. If it were true, I could readily see how it might be to my advantage to give up my roving life, get married, and settle down. With sudden determination, I rose and put on my hat, then started up the narrow lane that joined my cottage with the farmhouse where Mary lived. I found her at home, and imagined that I saw a look of eager anticipation in her eyes, though her voice was calm as she greeted me. I would have given a great deal to know whether she too had heard the news; but nothing in her manner gave any indication concerning this.

The viewpoint in such a passage is clearly defined. We assume the hero's identity for the time being and see events through his eyes, we hear only what he hears and think only his thoughts. Everything that passes through his mind is known to us, but the mind of Mary is a closed book.

If we should go on to say: "Mary was thinking that this was a strange hour for a call," a glaring distortion would result. Since the viewpoint character does not know what Mary thinks, neither can the reader know. But the same thought can be brought out in a way that does no violence to the viewpoint. Examples: "I suppose she considered it a strange hour for a call"; or, "I learned afterward that she considered it a strange hour for a call." Either phrase gives the thought as it would naturally come through the viewpoint character.

But the first-person narrative is not the only one in which a strict single viewpoint may be maintained. The same paragraph may be written in the third person, with no change except in the pronouns:

Martin sat for some time before his window, musing on the strange disclosure that his friend had just made. If it were true, he could readily see how it might be to his advantage to give up his roving life, get married, and settle down. With sudden determination, he rose and put on his hat, then started up the narrow lane that joined his cottage with the farmhouse where Mary lived. He found her at home, and imagined that he saw a look of eager anticipation in her eyes, though her voice was calm as she greeted him. He would have given a great deal to know whether she too had heard the news; but nothing in her manner gave any indication concerning this. Martin reflected that perhaps she considered it a strange hour for a call.

The same rules apply here that apply to the first-person form of narration. The same care must be taken to guard against discrepancies. If the reader assumes Martin's identity, he can witness nothing that Martin does not witness, nor think the thoughts of any

other character. It is good practice in strict singleness of viewpoint to write stories in the first person, then convert them into third person, as above.

When text-book writers speak of the single viewpoint, this is the viewpoint to which they usually refer. It is the simplest form, and the most practical for the writer who is yet uncertain of his technique. This viewpoint makes for vividness of impression. For a time the reader actually lives the life of the viewpoint character.

But there are other single viewpoints. For instance, there is the viewpoint of a spectator. The action is described as it would appear to an auditor in a theater. In a story told from the external viewpoint no unexpressed thoughts of any of the characters in the story can be quoted, but, on the other hand, we are not limited to that part of the action which is witnessed by one character alone. In order to conform to the external viewpoint, our paragraph would be presented after this fashion:

Martin sat for some time before his window, musing. He had sat thus ever since his friend made the strange disclosure. Brooks had pointed out that, under the circumstances, it would be to his advantage to give up his roving life, get married, and settle down. To this, Martin had made no reply; but suddenly, as if seized with new determination, he rose and put on his hat, then started up the narrow lane that joined his cottage with the farmhouse where Mary lived. He found her at home, and though her voice was calm as she greeted him, a look of eager anticipation could have been seen in her eyes. Nothing in her words or manner indicated whether she had heard the news. "Perhaps you may think it a strange hour for a call," commented Martin.

Each viewpoint brings with it new limitations—and new opportunities. From the spectator's point of view we gain the direct advantage of stating certain things as facts, instead of disclosing them through the mind of a character. We can say definitely that "a look of eager anticipation could have been seen" in Mary's eyes; but we can not state with authority that Martin saw it. We can picture Martin before his window musing, but only by implication can we indicate the probable burden of his thoughts; whereas, from his personal viewpoint it was possible to say just what occupied his mind.

The external viewpoint is rarely advisable. Though sometimes it may help to keep the reader "guessing," it does not permit him to "live" the incidents, and so the effect is usually less vivid than when the personal viewpoint is employed.

One of the most useful of all viewpoints is that which I might call, for want of a better term, the "shadow" viewpoint. A limitation of the strict personal viewpoint is that the central character can not logically picture himself. He is the camera, as it were, through which events are viewed, and it is only by the aid of a mirror that the camera can take its own picture. Mirrors are not always convenient to introduce in fiction. It does not sound convincing for me to say: "My eyes flashed fire; my expression was terrible to behold; I stood before my enemy like an avenging demon." How can I know that I presented such an appearance? I may have felt like an avenging demon, but perhaps to an outsider I looked like a sputtering lunatic. It is all right in a third-person story to say of the viewpoint character: "Mary was serenely conscious of looking her best." That expresses her state of mind. But if we said: "Mary looked her best," we would be assuming the viewpoint of an observer toward her.

So much for what may be termed the personal viewpoint—a single viewpoint centered wholly in one character. But it would undoubtedly be an advantage to have a little more leeway than this viewpoint gives us: a leeway which would permit us to tell not only what our character thought, but how he looked—in fact, to tell some things of which he was unaware, as in this paragraph:

Jake eyed his cards with such concentration that he did not see Frisco Ike slyly draw an ace from his bootleg and slip it into the hand before him. As Jake studied his cards, he was endeavoring to make up his mind whether to "raise" or merely to "call." He felt that his opponent was "bluffing," but his heavy brows gathered in a tense frown as he estimated the cost of going too far. He knew that Ike was a shrewd poker player and that it behooved him to be alert. The roomful of hardened characters reflected the tensity of the moment. All eyes were fixed on Jake; even the barkeeper behind him stopped polishing glasses to await the decision.

Here we have obviously broken several rules, if the viewpoint is limited as before mentioned. We give Jake's thoughts, yet we describe some action that he does not witness, and include descriptive touches which conflict with the limitations of the personal viewpoint. Nevertheless, the paragraph is a legitimate employment of the single viewpoint.

For convenience, I have named this the "shadow" viewpoint.

If the writer does not understand its laws, this viewpoint has many pitfalls. For instance, the question arises: Since we have been permitted to tell what goes on behind Jake's back, are we privileged to stray wider afield and to tell what happened outside of the gambling room?

As a matter of fact, our liberty does not normally extend that far. What, then, are the limitations of this viewpoint?

The answer involves some abstractions which I hope may not be beyond the attentive writer. If they are, he will do best to leave this viewpoint alone.

The viewpoint, while not strictly Jake's, is that of his subjective or astral self, to employ a term familiar to occultists. For fictional purposes, we assume that this shadowy double-self exists and that the story is told from its viewpoint. Consider its properties and limitations. As an extension of the man himself it reaches beyond him, yet is a part of him. It thinks in unison with the man to whom it belongs, yet can look at him as an outsider, can see events that he may be too preoccupied to notice. It can observe threatening dangers which he may not realize, but can not warn him—unless he is in a very passive state. It has no separate existence and can not ordinarily witness events that are entirely out of his range; still, it has a definitely wider vision than he possesses. It can not enter into the thoughts of any character other than the man it overshadows.

This may sound like a very difficult and complex viewpoint, yet it is that which the majority of writers instinctively employ. They enter into close accord with the viewpoint character, but do not actually confine themselves to his or her limitations.

The utmost vividness of effect is possible through employing this viewpoint. As in the strict personal viewpoint, the reader enters into the thoughts and emotions of the central character, yet at the same time the character is a vivid external reality. Our illustrative paragraph might be elaborated under this viewpoint as follows:

Martin sat for some time before his window, his frank, handsome features reflecting the intensity of his thought as he mused on the strange disclosure that his friend had just made. If it were true—and at this he smiled his charac-

teristic flickering smile—he could readily see how it might be to his advantage to give up his roving life, get married, and settle down. With sudden determination, he rose and put on his hat—a jaunty hat that made him feel and look younger than he had allowed himself to feel for years. He started briskly—an altogether pleasing figure—up the narrow lane that joined his cottage with the farmhouse where Mary lived. She was at home, and he imagined that he saw a look of eager anticipation in her eyes, though her voice was calm as she greeted him. He would have given a great deal to know whether she too had heard the news; but only the letter concealed in her bodice betrayed that she might have received word, and he did not see the hasty movement with which she hid the letter there. Martin reflected that perhaps she considered it a strange hour for a call, and his expression was rather anxious as he opened the conversation.

This may or may not be an improvement on either the strict personal or the strict external viewpoint. The point is that it gives us greater freedom than either form, although it has its limitations. It permits us to paint a picture that is richer in atmosphere and details. It allows us to tell what Martin thought, how he looked, and to include mention of some things within the range of the "shadow" viewpoint, of which he had no knowledge whatever.

Of course, as we have transcended physical limitations, there is no reason why we should stop. The author may consciously take the viewpoint of an invisible sprite with the power to skip about, entering into the consciousness of one character after another. Thus considered, the so-called shifting viewpoint becomes a single viewpoint. But such liberties are dangerous. The farther we stray from ordinary physical limitations, the more difficult it is for the reader to follow us.

Then there is the omniscient viewpoint, used chiefly in novels, where a wider sweep is permissible. The author assumes the superior vantage point of a god toward his characters—with the privilege of entering into their thoughts, individually or collectively, and even of telling what none of them can have thought.

A collective viewpoint may be employed to advantage in some stories—and this, too, is a single viewpoint, if consistently handled. The action will center around one or two characters who are viewed externally, but not so much from the angle of a disinterested spectator as from that of the community as a whole. School stories, army stories, village stories, and others of similar nature may frequently be found illustrative of this.

As a rule, the viewpoint character is the central personage of the story; but in some instances it is necessary to narrate the incidents from the angle of a minor character. Such a viewpoint might be called the "personified shadow" viewpoint. This viewpoint is popular in detective fiction, in which the author does not care to give away the climax by telling what is in the detective's mind, yet wishes the reader to follow his movements closely. Thus, in the Sherlock Holmes stories we have Dr. Watson as the viewpoint character—a personified shadow of the great detective. In Arthur B. Reeve's Craig Kennedy stories, the assistant, Walter Jameson, maintains the viewpoint, though the detective is the chief character.

On rare occasions it will happen that a story demands the shifting viewpoint. The beginner had better not attempt such stories. They force the reader to make a new adjustment toward the story while it is being unfolded. In skilful hands this new adjustment—this changing of trains, as it were—may be so deftly accomplished that the reader does not realize that it is happening. There will be a gradual withdrawal from one viewpoint and a gradual entering into accord with a different character. Or, again, the change may be accomplished by a definite break in the story—a chapter division, or a change of scene, or a lapse of time. Such a break does not obviate the necessity for causing the reader to make a new adjustment, but it minimizes the sense of confusion that accompanies a too abrupt transition. The break, so to speak, wipes the mental slate clean for a new beginning.

The point of view should be a writer's first consideration in planning a story. When a plot idea has been isolated, examine it first in the light of this requirement. Can the story be developed from a single point of view? If not, probably something is wrong—the details have not been sufficiently worked out. When the defect has been corrected, the question arises, whose point of view will best bring out the theme and maintain the interest. It may be suggested that usually the story belongs to the character who undergoes the most pronounced change, who passes through the most intense activity. In a mystery story, the viewpoint belongs

certainly to some character who does not know the solution, but who has an intense interest in finding it out.

In actual narration, the viewpoint adopted should be impressed on the reader as early as possible—usually in the first paragraph. Thus, if Martin's thoughts are to be quoted anywhere in the course of the narrative, indicate this by quoting some of his thoughts in the opening paragraph, so that the reader may be familiarized with the point of view that is to be maintained throughout. Whatever the viewpoint of the story as a whole, try to let the opening paragraph represent it in miniature, and thereafter do not go beyond the bounds thus defined.

It should be mentioned, however, that occasionally the viewpoint may be assumed more gradually. Thus, the author may begin by describing the landscape, then several of the persons in it, then the central character, finally passing beyond externals and entering into the inner life and thoughts of that character. This is a process of gradually entering into the relation of that character's shadowy second-self. It is a transition by means of which the reader sloughs off his own identity in order to enter into that of the fiction character. Artistically handled, this transition may be very effective—it is a sort of "descent into matter." But it belongs rather to long fiction than to the short-story, in which the first sentences usually fix the viewpoint.

WORD LENSES

TO most writers, the planning of a literary composition, compared with the actual writing, is easy. In story-telling plot and construction follow laws that are within the comprehension of all who possess average constructive and mechanical sense. But narration is a more elusive problem. It depends much on ability to *feel* the way.

What is it that gives vitality and charm to the work of one writer, while that of another—rhetorically as correct—is cold and lifeless? What is that intangible quality called style?

Style is the impress of a writer's personality. As a man comes to be considered by his friends a cheerful or a gloomy person, a well-poised character or a weakling, so the writer is judged by the personal qualities he radiates through his style. "The style is the man."

Self-expression depends first of all on facility in the handling of words. The Frenchman who said to an American girl, "When you fell in the lake you must have been soused!" was not revealing his inner nature through the ungallant phrase; he was merely struggling, with an unfamiliar medium, to convey the idea, "you must have been soaking wet." It is evident that perfect self-expression is possible only to the writer who is skilled in the command of language.

Sometimes the novice will give up in discouragement because his ideas, when reduced to expression, seem crude, insipid, and commonplace. He reasons that this is evidence of mental poverty, when in reality it only shows his want of facility in the use of words.

A beautiful landscape is not less beautiful because the beginner's effort to transfer it to canvas has proved a daub. Nor need it be said that the author's conceptions are inferior because his endeavor to express them has failed.

It is, indeed, a good sign that one is able to realize such shortcomings. Too many writers look at their work through eyes that see not the result but only the original conception. Frequently we hear statements such as: "My story is as good as many that are published. If I could send it out under the name of Rex Beach or Mary Roberts Rinehart, I'm satisfied that the editors would gobble it up."

In an exceptional instance, this might be true. But the chances are that the author is self-deceived. In plain words, there is a difference between what he has written and what he thinks he has written.

For of every piece of literature there are two versions. The first is the version that existed in the author's mind; the other is the more or less imperfect copy of it which he succeeded in putting into language. In the case of a writer who has acquired facility in self-expression the two may be almost identical. The rest of us may, like Don Quixote, image a knightly combat with giants—while our picture of the fray appears to others only a ridiculous tilt with windmills. The absurdity of Cervantes's hero lay in his failure to realize how far short fell the result from his intent. Shun this danger. It is maya, the great illusion, which binds the writer to his limitations.

The great obstacle in the way of authorship is language. Words are a necessary evil; we should be better off could we dispense with them. True, they serve, in a crude and fragmentary way, to convey ideas from one mind to another; but even in skilful hands they accomplish the result imperfectly. It is easy to illustrate this. In one of the current magazines we find this bit of description:

A small creature she was, with a form that was slightly bent. Silvery hair was brushed back from a wrinkled face which showed traces of care and trouble; trembling hands were kept busy wiping tears from her faded eyes.

A fairly vivid description—yet consider. The author, when

he wrote it, had a definite picture in mind. To your mind, as you read it, a definite picture also is suggested. Now suppose that your mental image and the author's could be photographed and compared. Both would fit the description, but would there be even a family resemblance between the two women? If a million people should read the story without the aid of illustrations, would any two visualize quite the same person? Would Peter Newell's portrait of the old lady resemble Howard Chandler Christy's?

In another column we read:

It was the Sabbath, a balmy, summery, early autumn day, with a bright sun dimmed by a blue-tinted haze.

A clear description in a few words; but do we gain from it just the picture that was in the author's mind? A Southerner's conception of a "balmy" day will differ materially from that of one who lives in the extreme north. In the mountain regions we have an entirely different sort of haze from that which a seacoast dweller would picture.

So, after all, words are but an imperfect medium for conveying concepts. Our reason for using them is that, such as they are, they constitute the best means available for transferring ideas from one mind to another.

Words form, in fact, the projecting lens of the mental stereopticon. An image of thought or action exists in the mind of the author. He can not implant this image directly in the mind of the reader; the projecting lens of words is needed. The functions of authorship are therefore twofold. First, one must have definite thoughts to convey; second, he must devise the most perfect word lens possible with which to convey them.

The word lens of a novice is likely to be crude. It will convey but a distorted suggestion of the picture in his mind. At one point the thought will be intensified, at another it will be obscured by too much detail, at another the meaning will be entirely lost. Persistent and minute grinding is required before the lens will convey a clear, definite image. For an illustration of this grinding process, suppose that I have in mind a little domestic scene which I attempt to convey to the reader through the following word lens:

Grace moved toward her husband in a frenzy of exasperation. Nervously she upbraided and reproached him for his thoughtlessness in leaving the cellar light burning.

A glance will tell that this combination of words throws the scene entirely out of focus. Let us consider it in detail.

The word "moved" is too indefinite—it fails to focus the rays of light from my concept. Though the reader is given a hazy idea of an advance toward her husband, there is nothing to indicate whether Grace walked, floated, or dived.

"Frenzy" next draws our attention. It is an intensifying word, suggestive of wildness, of frothing at the mouth. A word so extreme should be used only to express the extreme of emotion. It unduly intensifies a trivial domestic quarrel and should be done away with.

"Nervously" exaggerates another triviality; it is unlikely that nervousness would be observable above the more pronounced state of exasperation.

"Upbraided and reproached." Here our lens is overthick—too many words are used to express a simple thought. Omit one of the verbs and the phrase will be more clear-cut.

In the final phrase, "thoughtlessness" implies an almost wilful lack of consideration for others, while "carelessness" or "neglect" is all that we wish to convey. In this case again, a milder word produces a clearer impression of the fact.

A correction of the lens that removes these flaws reduces our passage to the following form:

Grace took a step toward her husband. In exasperation at his carelessness she upbraided him for leaving the cellar light burning.

Beyond question a more correct picture of the scene has resulted from this careful regrinding.

A basic principle of word choice, which has been brought out through this example, is that extreme terms should be sparingly employed. It is better to understate a fact than to run any risk of overstating it. Overstatement results in artificiality—in melodrama.

Melodrama consists not so much in the nature of the action as in its treatment. Every one is familiar with the concave and convex

mirrors which form a part of the fun-making machinery in amusement resorts; one distorts the observer into an inconceivably tall and slender person, while another reflects him as ridiculously squat and of immense girth.

The melodramatic writer employs a word lens that gives similar distortion. He describes rather commonplace happenings in lurid terms. He endeavors to magnify his characters into giants by picturing them in hyperbolical language. The discerning reader is not likely to be convinced by such devices. Thus, of his heroine, this author says:

She was of wondrous beauty; her eyes were limpid pools of azure, her skin was whiter than driven snow, and her cheeks rivaled the tint of the rose.

We know that the author is not permitting us to see the real character back of this extravagant description; he is trying to magnify her through his word lens. How much more appropriate is the following:

She was a girl whom few would hesitate to call pretty. Large blue eyes and a naturally clear complexion were her chief attractions.

This picture is convincing and suggests a real character because of its moderation.

Ability to manufacture clear, perfect word lenses comes only from the practice of minute revision. Remember the first principle, which is moderation. And never permit yourself to rest satisfied with a word or a statement which fails to convey just the right shade of meaning—unless you wish your vision to become clouded so that presently you will be unable to tell a distorted image from the true.

The principle of the word lens is back of the editorial demand for conciseness. In optics, it is well known that a thick lens of poor-quality glass will obscure the light so that the image projected through will be vague. But grind this same piece of glass down to comparative thinness, and the tendency toward obscuration is minimized. True, a thick lens will magnify more powerfully; but this is no advantage if the image is clouded.

So it is with narration. "The editor sent back my five-thousand-word story, saying that it was twice too long," complains a

writer; "yet in every issue he publishes others equally long and just as capable of condensation." The explanation is apparent. The slightest clumsiness in the handling of words—and few writers are wholly beyond such clumsiness—clouds the image. This effect may be scarcely noticeable if we economize our words; but if we make a thick lens out of our not-quite-perfect material, the ideas we wish to convey will lack the clear-cut outlines essential to their adequate expression. The skilful writer, whose mastery of style is so complete that he can make a crystal-clear lens of great thickness, may indulge as much as he desires in descriptive passages, atmosphere, and intricate characterization. But such writers know that even they lose some of their proper force if they yield to wordiness.

Condensation is important training for one who would develop skill at grinding word lenses. By studying to find a single word that will answer for a phrase, a phrase that will answer for a paragraph, the writer acquires a fine sense of word distinctions.

What, then, of the earlier statement that style is the impress of a writer's personality? If style accomplishes this change in the material, then does it not involve some distortion of the picture?

Only indirectly. The personality of the writer is the *light* which projects the image. The color of this light will produce some modification. If the word lens is a perfect medium of expression, whatever is conveyed through it will be a clear image of the writer's thought, tinted by his personality. Thus, of two writers describing the same event, one may color it with humor, the other with gloom.

Readers are more susceptible than many realize to the intangible impress of personality which shines through an author's language. One style suggests high ideals and enthusiasm, another reveals depression and cynicism, each writer, to the practised intuition, betraying his inner nature through his manner of expression. The public should not be censured for preferring those writers whose mental outlook colors their work with the rosy tints of self-confidence, of enthusiasm, of romance and of humor.

And herein may be found a not unprofitable suggestion for the gloomy and embittered writer who desires to be widely read.

THE PLACE OF TECHNIQUE

"MASTER the rules of literary technique, then forget all about them." Paradoxical as it may seem, this is good advice. But it is sometimes puzzling to understand why, as soon as rules are mastered, they cease to have value. What is the place of technique in a writer's development?

Technique is the eggshell which protects the embryo in its formative stages. When the wings of genius have developed, the shell hopelessly limits their use and further growth. It has served its purpose and should be cast aside—forgotten.

Like the birdlet, the writer can not soar before he has outgrown his limitations—if the shell is too soon discarded, he will cease to grow. So it is that the young fiction writer will rarely begin to show progress until he or she ceases writing at random and systematically masters the rules and formulas of the art. When power of orderly self-expression has been attained through conforming to technical standards, then, and not before, can the limitations be removed.

This is why the young writer can not afford to excuse himself for straining a point of technique by replying: "But So-and-so, whose name appears in all the big magazines, does it." That the four-weeks-old chick has cast aside its shell is no proof that the two-weeks-old embryo can afford to do so. When you have acquired facility for plot building, you can afford to forget plot; when you can construct a story according to the single viewpoint, you may, if desired, employ a dozen viewpoints; when you know how to write concisely, you may feel free to indulge in elaboration. Break the shell before it is too late—but do not break it till you are sure that its purpose has been served.

CREATIVE CHARACTERIZATION

MAGAZINES of today have little room for character description. True, the demand for vivid portrayal of character remains—but it must be met by indirect methods.

While this statement is overbroad, inasmuch as there are exceptional instances, it does summarize the situation, particularly as regards the writer who is on the outer edge, trying to break into print. Authors who have attained rank and reputation are granted privileges which should not mislead the comparative novice.

In some respects, at any rate, the modern tendency toward the elimination of such descriptive passages is to be commended. Vividness of character drawing and convincingness of atmosphere are in demand as much as ever; the restriction is that they must be secured with economy of words. More skill is required for presenting a clearly rounded picture in a single sentence than for producing the same effect by pages of detailed description. In the ordinary story of action, a brief description when the character is introduced, and an occasional touch designed to bring out salient points in the course of the narrative are usually sufficient.

Character drawing is fundamentally a matter of visualization on the part of the story-teller. If he has a clear picture in his own mind and fair facility in expression, the complete picture is likely to be conveyed to the reader in ways almost too subtle for analysis—even though no direct description is employed.

It may be said that there are two methods of characterization. The distinction between them is rather intangible and there are all

degrees of overlapping, but they may be broadly designated as the "outline" method and the "creative" method.

The outline method takes advantage of a psychological fact which a little introspective analysis will make clear to the student. This fact is that when an object is brought to one's notice an image of it immediately springs into existence in the mind. We do not think in words—the normal habit is to think in pictures. Thus, the idea of taking a trip into the mountains may occur to me. Analyzing the thought, I find that it assumed the form of a vision of myself riding on a train, then standing amid typical mountain scenery. If I were to dwell on the subject more in detail, I should vision myself packing a suit-case, buying a ticket at the station, entering a train, and going through the whole experience—vaguely and disconnectedly, but still in picture form.

Occultists assert that to the clairvoyant vision thoughts are actually things—creations in an octave of matter that lies outside the range of ordinary physical senses. Thus, when I think of a horse, an image of that horse appears floating before me; if I think of standing on top of a certain cliff, I send an image of myself to the top of that cliff; if I write a novel and vividly picture the characters, they act out the story like puppets on a stage before me. These images, it is stated, are usually vague, and melt away when the attention is withdrawn; but if projected by a clear, definite thinker, they may persist in etheric matter for some time, particularly if the mind occasionally returns to them and dwells on them.

It is not necessary for any one to accept this interesting speculation, though it will appeal forcibly to most writers. At least, it forms a good working hypothesis. The writer who conceives his characters with strong precision is likely to impress clear pictures on the minds of others.

But it is by taking advantage of this process as it occurs among his readers that the author is enabled to accomplish results with economy of words. If I say "bird," hardly a reader of these lines but will have a mental picture, more or less defined, of such a creature. But now note how much more vivid is the image that

springs into being if I say "chicken." Our conception of a bird includes a canary, an ostrich, and hundreds of other types, though if an intense effort is made to give the concept definiteness of outline, each thinker will tend to visualize the type with which he or she is most familiar. But it is easier to picture a chicken than a bird, because the concept is less inclusive. Similarly, it is easier to picture a rooster than a chicken—easier to picture a fighting cock than a rooster. The greater the limitations implied by the word employed the more definite is the image.

The clever author, knowing that when he uses a certain word it evokes an image, merely furnishes suggestions and the picturizing faculty of his reader does the rest. True, the same word does not call up the same picture in every mind. The word "man" to me tends to evoke the image of a typical American, garbed in latter-day clothes. The same word to a Japanese would suggest a specimen of his own race. To a naked savage it would mean some one like himself. The point is, however, that in each case the word, if understood, calls up an image.

The principle applies also to incidents. A brief statement may evoke a distinct picture. Thus:

The chicken ran right in front of the automobile.

This may seem a description of the incident, but in reality it is merely a suggestion upon which the reader instinctively elaborates. The word "chicken" forms, as it were, an outline into which flows the reader's concept of whatever type of chicken he is most familiar with. Similarly, the picture of an automobile, of the design chiefly familiar to the individual reader, will fill in the outline suggested by that word.

The phrase, "ran right in front," suggests the action of the chicken; but this is as far as the incident is described by the author. It is almost certain that further details have been supplied by the proclivity of the reader's mind—like nature—to abhor a vacuum. For instance, nothing is mentioned in the sentence about the scene; but it is probable that in every resulting mental image a definite road has been placed under the wheels of the automobile,

and there will be a more or less hazy impression of surroundings, probably in the country, as an appropriate background for the chicken. Moreover, nothing has been said as to whether the machine was occupied, or whether it was in motion. Yet it is probable that any reader's conceptions will include at least one occupant; also that the car, as well as the chicken, will appear in motion.

Of course, this method is dependent upon an audience familiar with the objects symbolized by the few suggestive words. For greater precision, more detail may be employed, but the power of evoking images contained in a simple grouping of nouns and verbs is immense—all because of the universal picture-making tendency of the human mind.

The easy method of characterization, thus viewed, consists merely in exercising care that the right outline be presented. The first requirement is that it must be an outline which all probable readers are capable of filling with detail. When I say, "The tramp picked up a stone and threw it at the dog," I am reasonably safe in assuming that my readers will have concepts ready to fill the outlines suggested by the nouns and verbs. But if I say, "The maenad selected a barong and cast it at the criosphinx," in the average mind no picture would be ready to flow into the outline. It is obvious, therefore, that more description would be needed in connection with such an incident than with the first.

Following is a characteristic bit of outline description:

Banks was a typical broker, alert, complacent, and businesslike in appearance.

Though this is a mere outline picture, it is likely to evoke a fairly clear image, because the average reader has a set of concepts ready to be called up by the nouns and adjectives. The word "broker" alone brings before the mind an image. The word "alert" emphasizes a certain quality in this particular broker's make-up; "complacent" emphasizes another, and "businesslike" still another. Even though our image of a broker would include these typical qualities, specific mention brings them into sharper distinctness.

The weakness of such description is that it would never sug-

gest an image for a reader brought up in the wilderness, who had never seen a business man, and knew nothing of brokers.

This is the type of characterization chiefly found in short-stories and novels of the day. It is practical and may be mastered by a fair amount of practice. But since it depends upon images already present in the reader's mind, and because it fails if such images be not already implanted, we may safely say that it is not *creative*. It does not compare with such actual creation of character as may be found in the work of the masters, past or present.

Consider, for instance, the characters in a novel by Balzac, Dickens, or Thackeray. The large majority of their characters are types with which the average modern American reader is unacquainted. They force their own individuality upon the mind, no more depending upon our previous conceptions than would a visitor who entered by the door of the room instead of the door of literature. So far as our impressions of them are concerned, they are actual, breathing persons. Instead of depending upon our previous conceptions, they help, just as do new acquaintances, to extend them. This may be illustrated. Suppose that, taking the broker description for a model, I say:

He was a typical Parisian tradesman of the early nineteenth century.

Now this outline is unlikely to evoke in the mind of the everyday reader an image approaching in clarity that aroused by the broker description; for comparatively few have any ready-prepared concepts regarding Parisian tradesmen, particularly of a past period. But if we have read, for example, Balzac's *Cesar Birotteau*, the description at once evokes a clear image. To us, the typical Parisian tradesman will be a copy of Cesar Birotteau. If a further limitation be added—say that “his figure was spare and his eyes piercing”—our pictured tradesman will still be a Cesar Birotteau, grown thin and piercing of eye.

It is evident that in addressing an audience acquainted with Balzac's hero we are safe in employing an outline description; but what of Balzac, who built up for us an acquaintance with a man with whose type we were not familiar? His feat surely belongs

to the realm of creation. It would seem—at least to an admirer of Balzac—that Cesar could have been no more real to the Parisians who were familiar with his like than he is to readers of a later day and a different land.

How does the master thus *create* characters, so that they are independent of previous concepts that may exist in the mind of the reader?

The secret, of course, defies perfect analysis. But we may be sure that such an author knows his story people thoroughly—he knows the types from which they arose and possesses a discerning eye for essential details in picturing them. We may be sure that he does not feel that he is “making up” what they say and do as he goes along. Within his mind they are living entities. They can no more do or say an uncharacteristic thing than can people of the real world. If such a character so much as winks an eye, he does it in his own peculiar manner, and if the author sees fit to mention the action, he takes pains to make known the manner of its performance.

The term “outline” as here employed may require a little definition. It implies a limitation—an outer boundary. It may *include* a number of objects, but it *excludes* many more. The term “bird” is definite to a certain degree; it includes a great many species; but it excludes horses, sunflowers, clouds—an infinity of things. The term “chicken” excludes all these and many creatures besides—canaries and ostriches, for instance; but it may include roosters, pullets and baby chicks of all sorts—to say nothing of its implication in the slang of the day! If we employ the word “hen,” the boundary is greatly narrowed; if we say “white leghorn hen,” we exclude a hundred other types; and if we say “a white leghorn hen with one eye,” we have come close to individualizing her. The schoolmen used to say that “every angel is his own species”; so each individual is the only person of his or her kind in the world; the things which define the individual are those things that no other person possesses in the same combination.

The keynote of vivid characterization, then, is limitation. With

each evidence of what our subject is *not*, some of the haze that may have lingered about the reader's concept is cleared up. For example, I may make the following assertion:

That is a person.

This statement excludes hundreds of concepts, but the outlines of the mental image evoked, although rigidly shutting out natural objects, lower animals, and the like, include men, women, and children of all types, civilized, barbarian, savage. We may make the outline tremendously more definite by saying:

That person is a man.

At once the nebulous concept vaguely takes form—because women and children are excluded, though still we do not see the subject well enough to determine whether he is savage or cultured, whether white, black, or yellow, whether clad in fig leaves, a 1916 fall model, or a Roman toga, whether he is short, tall, fat, or lean. But in a few words we may bring the outlines into immeasurably greater distinctness, thus:

The man is a tall, well-developed college graduate.

This eliminates the fig leaf and the toga, the lean, fat, black, and yellow men, for if we employ the term college graduate without further limitation the reader will understand us to mean the *typical* college graduate. The outline is really quite definite—as definite as would be the outline of a real man seen from a moderate distance. It is only the intimate, close-up details that the reader would not now find clear. The features and expression of the subject are nebulous, as are also the color of his hair and his style of dress, his name, his station in life. This vagueness can be cleared by adding a few more limitations:

That tall, well-developed college graduate with fair hair and a boyish, good-natured face is Alfred Jones, son of the wealthy Joshua Jones.

For ordinary purposes this would be sufficient limitation to begin with. But it has not brought the character fully to life. There are many who, except for the minor point of the name, would fit the same description. It will remain for his conversation and manner, as they are brought out in the story, to make him really individual—to picture him as the *one* person of his kind.

Every time a fictional character says or does something which no other person could or would have done, his outlines become more clearly defined. Poor characterization is often a result of failure to realize this one point. The writers are prone to let their characters say the natural, expected thing, in given circumstances. The result is that they become too typical. While it is true that great fictional characters are almost invariably typical of their class, it is also true that the slight variations from type have made them great. David Harum is extremely typical in his broad outlines; but his little individual twists and quirks of character and manner are what make him a reality to be remembered.

When Diogenes told the patronizing Alexander that the only favor he desired was that the king should stand out of his sunlight, this remark alone served to define the philosopher. He is perhaps the one man in history who would have made such a reply.

For vividness of characterization, then, watch for opportunities to present your story people as acting differently from the way that any one else would have acted in similar circumstances. It is easy to imagine the average wife, when told that her husband has run away with another woman, crying: "The wretch—I'll never forgive him!" or words to that effect. It would hardly matter whether her married life up to the point of the tragedy had been blissful or the opposite. But this situation might readily serve as an opportunity for a fiction heroine to step out of the typical class and become a distinct individual. Her reply might be: "Very well—ask him if he'd prefer to have his trunk sent on, too."

It is well, so far as possible, to let one's characters act otherwise than they would be expected to act. This, of course, is advice that must be followed with judgment. Unless gifted with intuition, a writer who attempts it will run the risk of making his characters inconsistent, if not impossible. But unexpectedness gives life and spice both to the characterization and to the story as a whole. The man who loves where others would be vindictive, the woman who smiles where most would give way to tears, the child who fights when he might be expected to run, the wife who forgives where

others would condemn, the saint who swears, the thief who prays, the dog that laughs, the woman who defies convention—all these have achieved individuality. Good or evil, they are interesting because they have ceased to be purely typical. When we call to mind Mr. Micawber, Pere Goriot, Madame Bovary, Becky Sharp, Topsy, Anna Karenina, Tom Sawyer—we picture not merely typical people but individuals, as distinct from others as those we meet in daily life. And it may be asserted that they have been brought to life by this one device, however unconsciously the author applied it—the device of putting them into situations where their characteristic traits might become manifest in thought, speech, or action.

The fiction writer is often advised to study human nature; but a great deal depends on how this study is carried out and systematized. It helps greatly in our characterization to observe people with whom we come in contact, particularly those with marked individual characteristics, and to make an effort to differentiate between those things they say and do which are typical and those which betray their variation from the type. In studying examples of fiction, note similar devices. Putting an unexpected remark in the mouth of a character is often the author's deliberate method of making that character individual.

THE LAW OF RHYTHMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Rest is not quitting the busy career,
Rest is the fitting of self to its sphere.*

THE familiar saying that we learn to swim in winter and to skate in summer applies particularly to literary composition. Often, after a nonproductive period, enforced or otherwise, the work will be resumed with much greater zest and effectiveness. New powers of thought and expression seem to have been generated in the interval.

The writer who studies his own development will find that a systematic law governs this process. It is no mere coincidence that an access of power follows a period of rest or inactivity. Consider how our physical muscles grow. During exercise we wear out our strength, rather than increase it. In the morning the athlete may be able to lift a hundred-pound weight; by evening an eighty-pound weight will tax his energies. But during the rest period his tired muscles recover, and the next morning the same athlete will find his strength not only equal to that of the day before but a degree augmented. We do not grow while actually exercising; real growth takes place during the rest periods.

So is it with the writer. Often a season of effort will seem to bear but little fruit. "I began a course of regular writing six months ago," complains the student, "thinking that I might expect soon to see evidences of real progress; but I really believe that some of my earlier sketches, aside from minor crudities of expression, were stronger as well as more spontaneous than my later ones."

No doubt they were—and this may seem an argument against persistent, regular practice. But it isn't. After a complete rest, the results of the practice period will become manifest. Relaxation alone will not accomplish results, nor will practice alone—it is the alternation that counts. The student who consciously applies this law will certainly see results.

The East has taught the Western world much regarding the laws of growth, but we have yet a great deal to learn from Oriental teachers. The Hindu philosopher sees rhythm in all things. The inhalation and exhalation of the breath, the systole and diastole of the heart, the alternation of day and night, of the seasons, of sleeping and waking, the rise and fall of the tides and the waxing and waning of the moon—these are to him but familiar physical evidences of the great law of life. His science of God and the soul is based upon it. By the rhythmic alternation of the outbreathing and the inbreathing of Brahma, the universe passes into manifestation and will return to nonmanifestation; the individual soul develops self-consciousness by alternately swinging into incarnation and into the realm of spirit, where the experiences of the past life are assimilated—to bear their fruits when the law of rhythm carries the soul back to rebirth. This, at least, is the philosophy of the Eastern mystic who clings to the spirit of the ancient wisdom. It is a fascinating subject, and the key is rhythm, rhythm, rhythm.

But Western science contributes its quota of evidence to the universality of the law. It tentatively associates matter with vibration, and explains the phenomena of electricity, heat, light and sound by postulating undulatory waves in the ether. Many evidences not cited here indicate that rhythm is in truth the law underlying all things, and that one who works with the law will progress more rapidly than another who struggles blindly in opposition to it.

As every pendulum has its own rate of vibration, so, it may be said, every writer has his own rhythm. One may easily prove that progress is the result of alternating hard work with complete rest; but even better results follow when we know with assurance just what length of time to devote to each process. No one rule will

apply to all cases. Experimentation is perhaps the only method of determining one's "wave length," though intuition—that all-too-frequently submerged faculty—is the natural guide. When we begin to "grow stale," as the saying is, when the few ideas that are with difficulty conjured up seem hopelessly mediocre and the charm of authorship begins to pall—when these symptoms appear, it is usually safe to assume that the time has come to put the cover on the typewriter and take a rest. If possible, let this rest consist in getting close to nature. Sometimes a brisk walk or a quiet stroll will completely reverse the psychic currents and restore the lost magnetism; again, several weeks or months of relaxation may be necessary.

Whatever the time allotted to it, the rest should be complete. The swing of the pendulum will allow only a certain amount of perfect relaxation; when its momentum in this direction is spent, it will certainly sweep back toward activity; under its impetus the writer will feel an accession of ideas and renewed joy in his work. But this resilience follows only when the relaxation has been complete. As children, we "worked up" by throwing all our energy into the forward or backward motion of the swing. So may the writer "work up" to unrealized heights by taking full advantage of the impetus in either direction. But it will avail little to put our whole hearts into the work period if we rebel when the signal for a season of rest is given. The surest way of "letting the cat die" is to throw our weight against the natural momentum of the swing. If we rebel against the backward impulse, the next forward motion will attain a lower mark instead of a higher.

Sometimes circumstances arise that make it necessary to lay aside all literary aspirations for a period possibly of years. When the opportunity and the urge to write again assert themselves, doubt may be entertained as to the possibility of picking up the threads after so long an interval. Do not let yourself be cramped by this doubt. Though the conscious progress has been nil, your subconscious self has never lost sight of the old ambition. In taking up the work again you will find that a tremendous advance has been made in power and facility. This certainly is good theory, and I

have observed it in practice too many times to doubt that it is a dependable fact. Of course, when one takes up the work after long neglect, there is a natural "stiffness of the joints" to be overcome; but the forgotten technique of the craft may be quickly reacquired.

In planning their work according to the rhythmic law, successful writers have adopted different systems. Some devote one half of the year to writing and the other half to different pursuits. Others are content to give the greater part of the year to literary endeavor, with an annual vacation of from one to three months; and still others reverse this, producing their best work by concentrating it into two or three months of the year.

Those who make least progress are perhaps writers who work sporadically, a day or so at a time and at irregular intervals. Their pendulums are nearly at rest—the "cat" has all but "died," though it may be resuscitated. Such a writer, if he wishes to get back into the swing of progress, should begin to systematize his work, making the most of each impulse to labor, taking full advantage of every opportunity for rest, and thus "working up" toward the realization of his possibilities.

Within the greater rhythm is usually a lesser rhythm. Thus, the writer who devotes a certain part of his year to literary production divides the season of work into alternate hours of rest and labor. One will work eight hours a day, resting and recreating in the other sixteen. Another may find that he accomplishes more by working three hours a day than he would by working eight. Still another may divide the weeks and months into alternate working and resting periods. However the hours may be apportioned, it is at least advisable that the alternating periods should occur at regular intervals.

In addition to the general rhythm governing the writer's work as a whole, a rhythmic law underlies the production of any composition. In an earlier article in this series, on "Snowballing' a Plot," this principle was suggested by the illustration of plot development through turning the nucleus over and over in the mind until it became a full-fledged story outline. The principle is equally applica-

ble to the poem, the essay, the play, or any other imaginable form of literature. To force the development of an idea is inadvisable. If it involves problems that defy immediate solution, develop it as far as the way seems plain, then lay it aside and tomorrow the same problems will be surprisingly cleared up—or if not tomorrow, in their own good time. The rhythmic law governing literary composition is very like that governing the ripening of grain on the stalk or the fruit on the tree. Through the alternation of day and night and the seasons, all things, manifest or hidden, grow and ripen. But a thought that has been picked from the stem too soon—in other words, forced into premature development—is something to grieve over.

True, many ideas spring full-blown in the mind of the author and are at once ready for expression. Nor are they therefore necessarily superficial. Doubtless an idea may owe its perfection to the fact that for a long time it has been ripening undisturbed in the subconsciousness.

“Full wise is he that can himselfen knowe,” said Chaucer. Writer, know yourself! Study to learn your rate of vibration—the rhythmic law that governs your development. Succeeding, you will be reckoned some day among the wise. No one can do this for you so well as you should be able to do it for yourself. When you work, work whole-heartedly, with a sure consciousness that the effort must bear fruit, even though it may be delayed until after the next period of relaxation; and when you rest be equally whole-hearted in that, confident that you are making progress no less surely than in moments of intense activity.

PHOTOPLAYS OR FICTION?

CONDITIONS in the literary field at the present time are more favorable for the beginning writer than they have been not so very long past, and peculiarly enough, this is a result of the photoplay vogue. The beginner, in former days, had no prospective field other than the magazines; hence, competition for the bottom rungs was very keen. Now, however, most novices turn their attention to photoplay writing, because they reason that a good story, even though told without literary charm, will get by as a photoplay outline.

This reasoning is logical. However, it is unfair to encourage writers to expect that they can easily break into the photoplay markets. The field is a difficult one, and it is becoming more and more limited to professionals on the staffs of the various producing companies. The writer of some literary ability will do best, in most cases, if he concentrates upon trying to please the magazines, rather than the scenario directors.

The best chance in the photoplay field seems to exist for unusual comedy ideas. A greater number of serious dramas are produced, it is true; but it is also true that they are easier to write. Many a staff man can sit down and work out a more or less mediocre mystery story or "heart-throb" tale in a few hours; but a new humorous idea will not so readily come at the writer's call.

Competition in the photoplay field is increasing, rather than diminishing, while the opposite is the case, if anything, with story writing.

NAMING THE CHARACTERS

"**H**OW do you think of names for all your characters?" is a question successful authors are often asked. One writer answered this without hesitation: "Frankly, I don't know. When I conceive a character to fit a certain part, an appropriate name seems to pop into mind with his mental image. It is just as much a part of him as his whiskers and manner of speech."

This, undoubtedly, is characteristic of the mental processes of many experienced writers. However, it is probably a developed faculty. It comes from trying, in earlier efforts, to fit the name to the character.

Often it is difficult to decide whether a name should be commonplace or unusual. The familiar names, Smith, or Johnson, or Williams, in certain cases, may suggest lack of originality on the part of the writer. But in another instance, John Jones may be just the right name, denoting a man who is very representative, or again, a man who is so unique that he rises above his name.

A striking or unusual character should generally be suggested by a rather unusual name. It is often well to give your villain a harsh, repellent name, such as "Squeers," or "Fagin," or "Sikes." Strength is denoted by certain rugged names, as "Grant," "Wainwright," etc. However, it is true that not all names suggest the same traits to different people. And no rule can be given—except to search until you find the name that seems to you, as writer, to fit the character. The chief thing for which many writers may be criticised in such connection is that they give too little attention to this feature.

Incidentally, be careful not to give your villain a name that is too frequently met with in real life. A story recently came back from a prominent editor with the advice that it might be well to change the name of an unsavory family described therein, as there were at least five hundred sensitive readers of that name in the United States. This suggestion is worth heeding, though it might perhaps be an unwarranted deduction to suppose that a story would leap into instant popularity because the heroine happened to be Miss Smith, and the hero John Jones.

HACKNEYED PLOTS

ALMOST any plot or situation can be "put over," if the author possesses sufficient skill; but a number have become so hackneyed through repeated use that for practical purposes they may be spoken of as unsalable. An old plot with "modern trimmings," is a dependable commodity in the market—but some are so old that it is mighty hard to attach the trimmings.

Apparently the only sure way for an aspiring author to progress beyond all the possible hackneyed stories is to write them and thus "get them out of his system." It seems necessary for every writer to try his hand once at each of the following "standbys":

The "rube" story. Farmer Hayseed comes to the city and falls into the toils of a gang of swindlers, who endeavor to secure his "roll." But in spite of his innocence, Farmer H. is a wise old duck, and neatly "skins the skinners."

The salted mine story. A tenderfoot buys a mine that has been given a fictitious value by an unscrupulous promoter. But the tenderfoot turns the tables, either by discovering an actual vein of rich ore in the mine or making the promoter believe that he has done so and selling it back at an advanced rate.

The racehorse story—now frequently transposed to an automobile, motorcycle, aeroplane, or other setting. A stranger with a jaded, apparently ambitionless "nag" comes into a community and manages to be drawn into a horse race. He surprises everybody by winning the race and departing with all the wagered money in sight. It is afterward discovered that the horse was a famous trotter in disguise—a ringer.

“The Heroism of a Coward.” I must put this in quotation marks, because it is the title of one of the first stories I ever sold. The acceptance must have been an accident, for the tale of a man who has shown what seems to be a yellow streak, but who eventually redeems himself by a supreme act of heroism, has been done to death. It is especially popular in these “parlous” times of war.

The dream story. A character contemplating an unworthy course of action falls asleep and dreams that he carries it out to a horrifying conclusion. He wakes in the throes of remorse, to find that he still has a chance to select the better course.

The intercepted letter. Stories based on a misunderstanding between lovers, owing to the failure of a letter to reach its destination (the “villyane” usually sees to this part), have actually been known to attain great popularity. This was long the favorite device for keeping the lovers in despair and the reader in suspense—but the good old days are passing.

The jealous husband or lover, who sees his wife or sweetheart kiss another man and seeks revenge—only to discover that the other man is the woman’s brother, or at least some close relative—is another old favorite. It has all the essentials of suspense and a surprise ending; but it became obsolete through repetition before most present-day literary aspirants saw the light.

This by no means exhausts the list of plots and situations that have served their day, though it may be said to skim the cream. The surest way for a young author to fortify himself against them is to get his versions down on paper. Like measles, they are seemingly a necessary annoyance—it is better to have them over with while one is young and needs the practice.

But how are we to know the hackneyed stories when we see them—by reading all the fiction that ever has been published?

That, of course, would be an impossible task. Nor should the writer be under the necessity of reading the prototypes of a story to know whether or not it is hackneyed. The test of the matter is not, “Have I read any other narratives based on this idea?” but, “Is it likely that many others have thought of this?”

If, for example, we turn to the battlefield, where the test of a man is chiefly his courage, what more natural than that the fiction-bent mind should hit upon the idea of a soldier who acquires a reputation for cowardice, but eventually proves himself the bravest of the brave? The intuitive writer would discard this plot because it seems likely to have been many times thought of before.

Let the student who feels that all the possible stories have been written take hope. An infinity of stories remain to be written. In order to discover them, the writer should be equipped with a type of mind similar to that of the pioneer or the inventor. Those who take up literature possess this type of mind—it is the force that urges them to express themselves through the medium of words. That our efforts to produce something new are often ineffective is no evidence that the inventive, the pioneer faculty is lacking. It may mean that we have not yet developed the strength necessary to force a way into the uncharted region—and strength will be developed by persistence.

“HE SAID” AND “SHE SAID”

ONE of the mistakes into which writers are prone to fall is undue straining for variety. This quality, in itself good, may easily be sought to excess. The skilful stylist will never seem to avoid a natural word for the mere purpose of securing variety, even though such word may involve repetition. The repetition is likely to be less conspicuous than would be the effort to avoid it. Macaulay's most famous writings conspicuously show his adherence to this view.

I have read boasts from writers who claimed that they never employed “said” in any combination in recording dialogue. Many times I have also read their stories and regretted the wasted effort that went into avoiding the offending monosyllable. The substitutes were frequently more objectionable than the avoided word itself, even if this were repeated to the point of monotony.

To the desk of an editor frequently come stories containing such passages of dialogue as this:

“I want you to promise me,” he decided.

“I am sorry,” she disappointed him; “but I can not.”

“Very well,” he raged. “This ends everything between us.”

“You are unreasonable,” she asseverated.

“Not at all,” he differed.

“But,” she particularized, “I told you beforehand that I could make no such promise.”

“You have been known to change your mind before,” he shrugged.

This is no exaggeration. Editors frequently pass upon stories written in similar style in dead earnest. Sometimes, it is true, they accept them—but not often.

The experienced writer is rarely afraid of “said” and its almost equally common variants, “replied,” “answered,” “asked,” “in-

quired," and the like. As a rule, these permit of sufficient variety, and when its omission does not confuse the sense, the explanatory phrase may be dropped altogether. The illustrative passage will certainly be improved if rewritten:

"I want you to promise me," he said decisively.
 "I am sorry," she replied, "but I can not."
 "Very well," he said angrily, "This ends everything between us."
 "You are unreasonable."
 "Not at all," he answered shortly.
 "But I told you beforehand that I could make no such promise."
 "You have been known to change your mind before," he said with a shrug.

A moderate amount of repetition of the words "said," "replied," "asked," etc., is not likely to be noticed by the reader, because they are so familiar. A style that fairly bristles with such words, though it may be capable of improvement, will attract less unfavorable attention than a style in which there is obvious straining to avoid them.

In glancing down a couple of representative columns of dialogue in magazines picked up at random, I find the following series of expressions:

EXAMPLE ONE.

—she asked.
 —he said.
 —she answered with a sigh.
 —he said.
 —she said.
 —he cried.
 —he said uneasily.
 —he added.
 —she said.
 —said Dick.
 —she said.
 —asked Korwin.
 —repeated Korwin curiously.
 —asked Korwin.
 —said Ruth.
 —Ruth added.
 —said Ruth.
 —said Korwin gravely.
 —said Korwin.
 —she said.
 She said:
 —she said.
 —he added.

EXAMPLE TWO.

—she inquired in her soft, careful little voice.
 —said the young man briefly.
 —begged Miss Juliet.
 —breathed Miss Juliet.
 —suggested the young man, half questioning himself.
 —said Miss Juliet.
 —said Miss Juliet.
 —the young man admitted with the merest trace of affected boredom.
 —Miss Juliet told him, breathless.
 —he advised her kindly.
 —said Miss Juliet softly.
 —she answered him eagerly.
 —explained Miss Juliet.
 —said Miss Juliet.
 —Henley agreed cheerfully.
 —she continued, adorably sincere.
 —said Henley with a small grimace of distaste.
 —she explained flushing.
 —Miss Juliet's lips said primly.
 —said Henley.

The first example is from an adventure story in an all-fiction magazine; the second is from Fannie Heaslip Lea's "Miss Juliet," in Collier's for October 14, 1916. It will be noted that in the latter there is a much more pronounced effort to convey to the reader fine

shades of character drawing—to give just the tone and the manner of the speaker. But in neither case is there a noticeable tendency to avoid the word "said" and its more familiar substitutes. Both passages from which the above examples were chosen read naturally and smoothly. Imagine the "Miss Juliet" passage as it would read if the author had determined that the word "said" should not appear in her work—"briefed the young man"—"soft-pedaled Miss Juliet"—"primmed Miss Juliet's lips"! Positively, there are writers who would commit such atrocities.

It should be noted that in these same columns are many fragments of dialogue in which no explanatory clause occurs, the speech itself being of such a nature as to convey to the reader the identity of the speaker. Note again that in both cases the writer's *preference* seems to be for the adverbial modifier of the word indicating speech, rather than for a verb that in itself contains the whole meaning. The exceptions are seemingly not sought but made necessary by the sense. "Said Miss Juliet beggingly" would not convey the right thought, hence "begged Miss Juliet" is employed; similarly, the variation, "breathed Miss Juliet" is almost necessitated because the right shade of meaning could be conveyed in no other way. In fact, "Miss Juliet told him, breathless," is employed further on, with entirely different effect. Whenever the sense permits, the author employs the simple form: "said the young man briefly," "she answered him eagerly." Yet there is no monotony of style. Even in example one, with its succession of only slightly modified "saids," the reader does not notice the repetition.

This is not an argument against variety, which is always welcome; it is merely a caution against overdoing it to such a degree that the style becomes strained.

Another caution in the same category might be directed against the overdone effort to avoid repeating the names of characters. When a man and a woman are in conversation, it is a simple matter to alternate "he said" with "Dick said" and "she said" with "Ruth said," thus securing some variety; but when two men are talking together "he said" will rarely do, because it does not ordinarily

indicate which "he" is meant. The writer is thus forced to employ all sorts of expedients if he wishes to avoid repeating the name of the character. The result is often such a passage as this:

Walter Dale and Homer Jones were talking over "boyhood days." Do you remember the old swimming hole?" inquired the former.

"I should say I do," responded his companion.

The first speaker puffed at his cigar reminiscently. "Many a ducking I've had in it," he commented.

"Yes," said the other, "and I'm afraid I helped to give you some of them."

The man who had acknowledged receiving the duckings looked up with a laugh. "Oh, the score is even," he observed, and the ducker was silenced.

Very ingenious in its avoidance of repetition, but also very awkward and amateurish. The names of the characters may be repeated several times without monotony, and the passage will read much more briskly with the awkward subterfuges eliminated. Thus:

Walter Dale and Homer Jones were talking over boyhood days. "Do you remember the old swimming hole?" inquired Dale.

"I should say I do," responded Jones.

Dale puffed at his cigar reminiscently. "Many a ducking I've had in it," he commented.

"Yes," said Jones, "and I'm afraid I helped to give you some of them."

Dale looked up with a laugh. "Oh, I guess the score was about even between us," he observed, and Jones was silenced.

"The other," "the former," and "the latter," should be banished from the writer's vocabulary. They are awkward as usually employed, because so obviously used to avoid the repetition of a character's name. The best plan is to write the first draft of a story without making the least effort to avoid repetitions of names or of "saids." In polishing the story, prune away those that obtrude too much—but as a rule it will be found that very few need be accorded such attention.

THE BOILER AND THE WHISTLE

FICTION involving emotion is something for the writer of average capabilities to avoid. Most of us fall into the way of sickly sentimentalism, or of melodrama, when trying to depict emotional scenes.

The only secret that can be imparted for the effective handling of emotion is *repression*. Emotion is a force, and like other forces it is powerful only when concentrated. Steam possesses tremendous power, but only when produced under pressure. Compressed air will move tons; but in its untrammelled state it is hardly thought of as a force. To take advantage of the vast potential power of a river we dam it, or confine it for its powerful use in hydraulics. Electricity, too, must be forced through a resisting medium in order to produce heat, light or power. A gunpowder explosion may hurl projectiles at inconceivable speed, but only when the explosive is confined in a small chamber.

Likewise emotion may be either aimlessly dissipated or confined and repressed until it becomes a driving, awe-inspiring, even dangerous power. One man will vent his anger in harmless sputtering, ranting, and frothing at the mouth; but beyond making a nuisance of himself he accomplishes little. Another man, equally provoked, will say nothing, do nothing, will scarcely change countenance, except, perhaps, for a dangerous glint in his eyes. This man is to be feared. His anger, being repressed, is a power that, when finally released, may kill.

Deep feeling can not be expressed, for as soon as emotion finds expression it loses its depth. People who cry easily, who gush over their friends, become wildly excited in emergencies, spout vindictiveness when they are irritated, dance and shout when they are pleased—such people probably do not feel very deeply. They are like engines that blow off so much steam through the safety valve that they never develop much power. They recall Abraham Lincoln's story of the little river steamboat which had a whistle so large in proportion to its boiler that every time it was blown the engine stopped.

The grief that can find no relief in tears, the love that is too reverent to express itself in caresses, the joy or anger that renders one speechless—these are the emotions that drive.

All this has its lesson for the fiction writer.

The tendency of the novice in handling an emotional passage is to "lay it on too thick." If his hero meets with a bereavement, he is pictured as moaning, tearing his hair and giving way to wild lamentations limited only by the extent of the author's imagination and vocabulary. If the same hero loves, he goes into sickly sentimental rhapsodies over the object of his devotion; the author fears lest the reader may not appreciate the intensity of his passion and so makes him maudlin. If the character is moved to pity, nothing less than crocodile tears will serve to express his feeling.

After reading such a passage, the author sometimes feels vaguely that the emotion is not altogether impressive. In an effort to make it so, he goes back over it and substitutes stronger adjectives, adds a few more heartbreaking sobs to the hero's grief, a few more sighs to his love scene, a few more quavers to his ejaculations of pity, and then he wonders why the editors fail to recognize a masterpiece.

The American ideal is sturdiness. Our people are far enough advanced in real culture to recognize that feeling is nowise to be measured by its outward expression. The grief that we most respect is silent grief, the love that impresses us is that which is felt rather

than talked about, the pity that convinces us of its sincerity is without ostentation. In a word, whether in real life or in fiction, the character whose manner under strong emotion is most repressed convinces us most of the real depth of his feeling.

Realizing this, the intuitive writer may permit his weak characters to rant and sentimentalize; but his strong characters will be self-contained. The child cries when hurt or grieved; the man tightens his lips. The untutored maid loudly bewails when calamity befalls her; in like misfortune the cultured woman whom she serves finds little expression beyond silent weeping. The weakling grovels and begs for mercy when his enemies get the better of him; the strong man shrugs his shoulders and meets torture and death with no outward tremor. Does this mean that the more developed type of humanity is less capable of feeling? Hardly. It would be as logical to say that a mighty turbine engine is less forceful than a teakettle, because it fails to spout steam under the same pressure.

Of course, the above illustrations will not always hold true. The maid may bear her grief silently, while the mistress gives way to lamentation; this only proves that in such instance the maid is the stronger of the two. There are self-contained children and sniveling men. Which, obviously, does not in the least affect the force of the argument.

Since deep emotion can not be expressed without being cheapened, the writer frequently finds it a difficult phase of life to depict. The law of suggestion is here very potent. Make the reader feel that the character is exercising repression, then the repressed emotion will also be felt. Suppose we illustrate this by parallel passages.

EXAMPLE ONE.

The scene is a typical business office; the president of the concern, a strong-featured man of affairs, is standing by his desk dictating to his stenographer. "I want to get everything out of the way," he observes, "so that I can go to the station to meet my wife." His eyes rest for a moment on a framed photograph that stands on his desk, then he turns his back on it and resumes his dictation. While he is in the midst of a letter, the office boy brings him a telegram.

EXAMPLE TWO.

The same scene—a typical business office; the president is dictating to his stenographer. "I want to get my desk clear," he explains, "so that I can go to the station to meet my wife. Ah, how I have missed her—how I long to see her sweet face again!" He goes on with his dictation. While he is in the midst of a letter, the office boy brings him a telegram. He seizes it feverishly, and tears it open. A look of bewilderment comes into his eyes, followed by one

He tears it open and pauses in his dictation to read it. For a moment he stares at the sheet of paper, then: "Where were we?"—turning to the stenographer. "Yes, I remember. (Dictates.)" "If our claims appeal to you, we stand ready to send a representative who will quote prices." Then, in a strained tone of voice: "That is all for today—you may go." Again he reads the telegram, then allows it to flutter from his fingers. In a daze, he walks slowly toward the door—pauses where his hat and coat hang on the rack, mechanically takes them down, and passes out, looking straight ahead. The stenographer picks up the telegram, reads it, then gazes after him with an expression of pity. The telegram announces that his wife is dead, the victim of a train wreck.

of wild despair. "My God!" he exclaims, dropping the telegram and raising both hands to his head. "She is dead! Dead! It can't be true—there is some mistake!" Again he searches for the telegram, finds it and reads. "No—there is no mistake. My little one—my adored one—killed in a train wreck—how can I bear it!" To the stenographer: "Leave me—leave me to my grief! No—I must go to her. My coat—my hat!" And so he rushes forth.

Which do you feel most sorry for? The man who bore his grief silently, or the one who gave vent to it in frenzied language? Ten to one the husband in the second example will be married again within a year!

If rightly pictured, such a scene as the first does not indicate callousness. The fact that the man did not give way to outward expression of grief shows two things—first, that he is strong, and second that the shock and grief are too terrible for expression. Why does he finish dictating his letter after receiving the telegram? Because it furnishes a sort of shock absorber. Often, when one receives sudden news, whether very good or very bad, or perhaps when one has a sudden sharp twinge of pain, he mechanically attends to some duty near at hand before *daring* to realize his sensation to the full. I recall witnessing, last summer, an exhibition of the national game in which a batted ball struck the pitcher in the groin. He picked up the ball, accurately threw the runner out at first, then collapsed. Had there been no immediate duty to take his mind from the pain, he probably would have collapsed instantly. Photoplay-wrights, who are wholly dependent on action to produce results, might well take note of this illustration.

Sometimes repression may take the form of a light or whimsical statement of a serious matter. Which of these two statements is the more impressive?

EXAMPLE ONE.

I looked up to find myself staring into the horrible black depths of a revolver barrel. The man who held it was evidently bent upon having my life. His ferocious glance was turned loweringly upon me. My blood ran cold at the realization of my predicament.

EXAMPLE TWO.

I looked up and found myself facing the business end of a revolver. The discovery was not exactly pleasant. I should have liked to request the man who held it to point the gun some other way, for fear it might accidentally go off. But a glance at his unsympathetic countenance convinced me that he was a grouchy individual who would probably resent the suggestion.

Most people will certainly find the second example more convincing, in spite of the fact that it is—or rather because it is—an *understatement* of the situation.

Repression may take the form of altogether omitting an impassioned scene. Unless you are a master hand at making love scenes interesting, you will contrive to skip them. Let Alonzo find his adored one waiting for him in the summerhouse under the starlight, perhaps give his first word of greeting; then skip to the time when they emerge from the summerhouse and stroll up the path, walking apart—oh, very far apart—under the curious eyes of the family and the neighbors. Repression again: the farther apart they walk on the path, the nearer together they have been in the summerhouse. And the reader's imagination has undoubtedly pictured a more idyllic bit of love-making than any writer short of Robert W. Chambers could (or would) describe in detail.

The final syllable of repression phonetically suggests the word "shun." The more details you shun in picturing an emotional scene, the more the reader will supply, provided you carefully furnish the right suggestions.

In picturing emotion, the simple, unaffected statements are of most account. But occasionally, it is true, a tremendous effect may be produced by letting a self-contained character "cut loose" in the story. When a man who seldom loses his poise explodes in wrath or displays some other pronounced emotion, we know that the provocation must be extreme. Such an event is worth saving for the climax of your production.

THE PURPOSE OF FICTION

A CORRESPONDENT recently propounded the query: "Do you consider the ultimate question in fiction one of method?" That is a big subject, and the answer can not be given offhand. I replied that I considered the ultimate question in fiction to be the providing of vicarious experience for readers. Viewed in this light, the question of matter or method sinks into insignificance. As well ask a famished man whether he wishes to drink because he realizes that water contains elements needed to support life, or because it affects his palate pleasantly. He will reply: "Because I'm dying of thirst!"

The fundamental purpose behind every phenomenon is the answering of a need. It is not alone in physics that nature abhors a vacuum. To ascertain the purpose of any institution or thing, discover the need that it supplies. If a need arises, a new thing is created. If the need vanishes, the thing atrophies and becomes extinct. To the naturalist, this is a self-evident fact. In reading one of the books of Colorado's nature-philosopher, Enos Mills, I was impressed by a comment on the lodgepole pine, which, instead of dropping its cones, retains them, imbedded sometimes deep in the trunk, until a fire sweeps over the region. The fire melts the wax of the cones, releasing the seeds, and thus insuring that the forest will be replanted. Think of a law so elemental, yet so complex, that in response to a need caused by the depredations of lightning, ages ago, a tree was developed which depended upon forest fires for its perpetuation!

All are familiar with the simpler illustrations of this law. The flower of a plant fills a need—to attract the insects that carry pollen from bloom to bloom and thus fertilize the plant. The leaves of a tree, the shell of a crab, the gills of a fish, the wings of a bird, the brain and nervous system of a man, are specialized developments that came in response to needs for nourishment, protection, and preservation of the species. The need came first and the faculty second. Had it not been for the needs that rose in the exigencies of our existence, we should still be amoebas. Evidently the more needy a man is, the better his chance of becoming something other than a nucleated mass of protoplasm. This should be good news to writers!

Many things, it is true, seem to us the very reverse of needs. It is only by analogy that we begin to realize, for instance, that such things as sickness, conflagrations, and wars are with us for our own good—each to fill a need. What the need is we may only speculate—probably it is to teach mankind how to avoid the errors that cause them.

Back of all this again is the question of why we need needs. The only answer is—for the sake of progress. Viewed in this light, it is better that mankind should be visited by calamities. Under utopian conditions we should stand still. Evolution is a constant reaching forward to catch up with our needs.

But we never shall catch up, for the primary need of the human race is experience. Out of experience we build toward perfection. By touching a heated radiator, the child learns through pain to keep away from hot objects. It is necessary for the savage to learn the elementary lessons that come from fighting, from being tortured, from slaying and being slain. As he progresses, it becomes necessary for him to learn by bitter experience to avoid unsanitary conditions, brutal practices, covetousness, selfishness, and other errors. Some of these lessons are still but half learned by people who call themselves civilized.

Though the gaining of experience is likely to be painful, it is sought after with almost violent eagerness. The desire of man-

kind for experience—or sensation, as it may be called—is like the parching thirst of the famished man. The great problem is to get enough of it to dull the craving. The savage did not fight merely because he was forced to; he fought because he gloried in it—because he thirsted for the exquisite sensation of carving and being carved. Nor is the savage spirit—the craving for elemental sensation—weeded out of us in this day. In many ways we deliberately seek pain because it provides extreme sensation. Boxing is an evident outgrowth of the desire to give and take punishment. Football, bronco “busting,” riding the “roller-coaster,” taking cold baths, eating or drinking highly seasoned viands—all these are enjoyed because they satisfy the thirst for sensation.

But along with the savage in man has been a development of subtle senses whose cravings for sensation are not to be satisfied by coarse physical pain. Battling with a club will not satisfy the newly awakened esthetic sense. Therefore, man seeks the art gallery, the concert hall, the great scenic outdoors, for experiences that will come within the scope of his new senses. And with this greater sensitiveness has come a demand for variety. The shopkeeper, for instance, lives a comparatively monotonous life, which nowhere near satisfies his thirst for—say experiences of the savage order. The factory girl has no way of satisfying her longings for esthetic sensation.

What is the result? Denied personal experiences in accord with their desires, they seek vicarious satisfaction. The shopkeeper, to appease his appetite for crude physical pain and action, becomes a patron of the prize ring. Lacking the physical constitution or the opportunity to stand up to an antagonist, he drinks in the experience by watching professionals crouch in a smoke-filled arena and hammer each other to a knockout.

The esthetic factory girl, on the other hand, goes home and reads Marie Corelli or Robert W. Chambers (perhaps we do her an injustice), and thus takes the edge off of her craving by living for a time in a realm above the sordid whir of machinery, the ugly tenement, and the unwashed dishes waiting in the sink.

As these two satisfy their thirst, so practically does all civilization satisfy its experience desires. Theater, baseball arena, football field, magazine and novel—all are direct outgrowths of the craving and the real need of humanity for more experience than the daily routine can supply. It is possible for a man in one day now to live a more varied life and acquire more experience than the primitive man could know in a lifetime. He may rise in the morning and write a thousand words of a novel in which—by the aid of his creative imagination—he ventures into the frozen North and fights a despairing battle with the elements. After breakfast, he may live for a few hours the life of a not too busy twentieth-century business man, closing his desk at eleven o'clock to listen to a lecture which takes him through the peaceful moorlands of the mountain-tops, over rocky passes, down stupendous gorges, and to the brink of glaciers and volcanoes. At a commercial-club luncheon following, he is taken by the speaker of the occasion to war-infested Europe and shown the pitiful state of a devastated country. In the afternoon he attends a "movie," where he lives through a turmoil of hazards with the fearless Helen, and chuckles through an impossible episode with Charlie Chaplin. After supper, he attends the theater to lose himself in a tense melodrama of the Kentucky mountains, and on returning home puts himself to sleep by reading the latest issue of *Zippy Stories*. May his dreams be undisturbed!

All of these are real experiences—not as intense, of course, as if lived in actual fact, but intense enough to build themselves into his brain. The narrative is the most convenient device for supplying the need of complex humanity for more experience than the daily routine will supply; hence the origin of the story-teller's art. Hence also the statement that the purpose of fiction is to provide vicarious experience for readers.

In putting this principle into practice, the essential thing for the writer is to know his audience. The readers of a certain type of magazine yearn for adventure, fighting, and violent physical action. This means that if such readers were to choose the life

they would live, they would choose such a life as this magazine commonly pictures. They would choose to be such persons as are the heroes of these tales—virile, fearless, and masterful. Any other type of central character would spoil the story for readers of this magazine, because they have no desire to think of themselves as playing other parts.

An attraction toward the opposite sex is shared by all; hence, love stories, in which we can assume the identity of a man or woman involved in a romance, are always in demand. The maid whose life is starved and sordid hungers to experience the sensations of a queen or a society belle, and so devours the novel featuring a lovely and wealthy heroine sought by a multitude of correctly tailored wooers. To the average reader two kinds of fiction have their appeal. One kind goes beyond his experience and gives him a totally new set of sensations. The other appeals to him because it calls up cherished experiences that he has had and helps him to live them over—is intensified by his real knowledge of the setting and conditions.

For the writer it is well to realize the need of presenting in every story at least one chief character with whom, in imagination, the reader can link himself. To enjoy the experiences of a story hero, we must live his life, and it is far pleasanter to imagine ourselves brave, resourceful, generous, and altogether admirable than to put ourselves into the position of a contemptible character. Many a story has been rejected because the hero—though perhaps true to life—was a little below the standard of heroism, honesty, or strength.

For every sort of experience there is perhaps an audience. One audience yearns for red-blooded adventure, another desires only experiences of an esthetic order, another cares more for romantic thrills, while still another revels in the unpleasant and sordid. The story that pleases only one of these audiences has a limited appeal. The “popular” writer is one whose work has an appeal to more than one audience. As a matter of fact, the composite reader represented by the public is an intricate blend of

desires. He is neither wholly esthetic in his tastes nor wholly savage. The story of red-blooded action only partly satisfies him; nor is he wholly satisfied with the story of purely esthetic appeal. The author who can satisfy him must be able to run the whole gamut of his desires—or the effect is thin. For this reader, a story must have a theme of broad significance, a melody of romance, an accompaniment of adventure, an obbligato of humor, many arpeggios of suspense, subnotes of tragedy, variations of atmosphere—at least this much to give the story a full, rich orchestration.

The average writer can not reach the general audience to which, for example, *The Saturday Evening Post* appeals, because he has not the range needed to touch responsive chords in the average composite reader. If I should hear the band play a new and catchy piece of music, I could perhaps go to the piano and pick out the melody from memory—that being all that I heard with sufficient clarity to distinguish it. But a musician would hear so much more, and with even greater distinctness, that he could reproduce the piece with all its richness of harmony. Fully as much difference exists between the writer who can write a perfectly good story, adapted to readers of a definitely limited type, and one who can write a story that satisfies the many-sided reader. The reason why there are comparatively few leading names in fiction, in spite of the great number of good writers, is that few men or women have the “ear” or the ability to feel the whole gamut of individual or racial desires. When I read a story that seems to me the offspring of such a “range,” no matter how crude in technique it may be, I begin to look for a future “name” in fiction. And I have picked some “winners” by recognizing this evidence of potential mastery.

Most writers are more limited in range than they realize. This is natural—we all have difficulty in recognizing that there are things of importance outside of those that interest us. The writer who lacks philosophy can not understand why his stories are accepted only by magazines catering to the superficial. The writer who does not care for romance fails to understand why the editors term his deeply philosophical narratives uninteresting. The writer

whose interests are confined to domestic and feminine problems wonders why she can not extend her field beyond the household magazines.

The range necessary to reach a broader audience can be cultivated. The simplest way of doing this is to find out the class of people to whom your stories do not appeal, and begin to aim directly at them. Study their interests, understand them, at least, even if you can not wholly sympathize with them. If you have thus far been limited to the purely adventure type of story, forget for a time the man readers who form the bulk of your audience, and consider the debutante, to whom it is probable that your type of story has now no appeal whatever. Work out the problem of gaining her interest. Think of her as your audience, and after analyzing her desires and motives, when you have this audience definitely fixed in mind, go over some of your purely adventure stories and play up features that will appeal to her. Then, if you can think of some auditor who is not interested in anything that the revised story represents—neither adventure nor romance—try to play up some phases that will broaden its field in that direction. Say, for instance, that you adapt it to the professor of philosophy in a college, or the minister of your church. If you succeed in these particulars, you will find that the story is richer in appeal than your average. Though you will still be sticking to the adventure story, your forte, it will not be a *mere* adventure story. It will have the elements of a fascinating romance, a deeper significance, and an uplift tone—hence, a wider audience, a broader appeal.

On the other hand, if you have been limited thus far to stories for the women's magazines, extend your field by studying men's activities and interests. Adapt this advice to yourself.

But don't become too ambitious to stray into other pastures until you have definitely nipped the grass of one. Concentrate particularly on those qualities and features that preponderate in the magazines you would like to enter.

After all is said, nothing in fiction seems to matter except our

success in laying before readers incidents that they can live through with real profit and with the result of definitely enlarging their experience bumps.

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